

Proper Care and Support of the Preaching Pastor

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Well, this morning I want to do something quite different and that is have more of a teaching and instruction session on the topic of the "Proper Care and Support of the Preaching Pastor." I say preaching pastor not to diminish the importance and the need to support all the pastors in the church, but the Scripture makes it clear that a preaching pastor is to be viewed in a different way. He works hard at preaching. Paul told Timothy it is worthy of double honor and there is a reason for that. I hope to get into some of that.

Let me say at the offset that there is so much I'm leaving out. I've had a dozen thoughts this morning of, "Boy, I need to say something about that or something about this." But you can't get everything in and I need to certainly be done on time. I guess I don't think I would be exaggerating at all to say that the most, most of the time as I'm talking to pastors and dealing with churches, the care and the support of the pastor is the one thing we seem to address the most. It's almost like there's some sort of deep inherent conclusions about supporting the pastor that are so difficult to get over. When I'm talking to brothers that I would sit at their feet and let them teach me, that I really respect, but I can get to this area on how the church should care for them and support them and they just tighten up and just like, "Oh, we're not supposed to talk about that. Don't go there." As if that's spiritual. That's not spiritual. The Bible talks a lot about this subject and that's what I'm going to do, is give you something of a systematic overview of some of the aspects because if I just did an exposition of one area, we'd leave out a lot of stuff that needs to be looked at.

So when you're dealing with the proper care and support of the preaching pastor, let me get right to the outline and we should have all the Scriptures on the screen. I hope we made it.

First of all, I. Pay them well. Is that not straightforward and simple? Pay them well. Now just stop for a moment: why wouldn't you? Do you know how many churches, I mean how many professing churches, I guess I should say, have some sort of hangup about, "We've got to be careful now that we don't pay this pastor too much." Where does that come from? Where is that thinking?

My former pastor here did such a good job of setting the foundation for a generous and joyous approach to taking care of your pastors, but it's not in Scripture. As a matter of fact, first subpoint which will be subpoint A and the Bible speaks of an obligation and a

debt church members owe to a faithful pastor. An obligation and a debt. Now, I know that makes some of you uncomfortable to hear that but let's see what the text has to say about that.

Romans 15:27, as Paul is writing about gifts to Macedonia and Achaia, he says, "Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them," that's indebted to the Jews through whom came the Savior and through whom came the truth, we are indebted to them, "For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things." So we have this general principle, first of all, that since spiritually the Jews were God's chosen instrument to bring us spiritual things, we have a debt to them and the context – listen to me – is absolutely and totally financial. This is talking about a financial gift.

I just challenge you pastors, how many times have you gotten in the pulpit and told your people, "You're indebted to me financially"? You would be biblical if you did. How come you'll wrestle with predestination and election and foreknowledge and choosing and calling and you won't deal with this? It's part of the word of God. It's true and right. You say, "Well, it seems self-serving." No, it's God-serving. It's God-serving.

3 John 5-8 speaking about some itinerant ministers who would drop in on the local churches John is writing to, he says this, "Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers; and they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought," notice the phrase "we ought." It's an obligation. It's right to do this. "We ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth." So when these itinerant ministers come through, John says, "Keep on doing what you're doing," and we're to understand that it's right, you ought to be helping them. Once again, the concept of churches helping churches. Some churches sent out these itinerant preaching church planters, and then other churches supported them and encouraged them and gave them financial support and sent them on the way to continue on in their work, but notice the concept again of obligation or debt that is owed to them.

Here's an interesting verse to think about, Galatians 6:5-6, "For each one will bear his own load." Now we've taught that in our churches and that's proper, that there is a general sense that everybody needs to carry their load. Everybody's got their spiritual gifts in the church and we ought to be teaching, instructing and helping everyone to carry their load. You know, we've worked extremely hard over these almost four decades now of teaching every minister, every member ministry through small groups, and we'll still run about 95% of our worship attendance in small group ministries and that's quite unheard of. It's because we believe that's what the church is. The church isn't a spectator sport. If your preaching doesn't produce members ministering, then something is faulty there, but you do have to work hard at structuring and enabling your people to care and minister for one another.

So every is carrying his own load. Then he says something very interesting and I want to think, "Paul, why did you say what you said in verse 6?" "The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him." Paul stops here. There is only one way in this context to interpret this verse. He stops here and says, "While everyone has his own load, you've got to understand something, the preaching pastor, the one who is teaching you, is not to carry his load alone. You're to support him. You're to help him in that load that he has because he can't do that load properly and then do all the other things all the other members of the body are doing, all the service gifts, the caring, the mercy ministries, the administrations, etc. Everybody has got to divide that up and carry their own load but the preaching minister, you've got to help him. You have an obligation to him as he carries that primary central role of the church of preaching the word."

I'm preaching through Philemon. I just began it on Sunday mornings, and I think this is an interesting verse, Philemon 1:18-20, "if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account." Now, you know the context. Philemon's slave, Onesimus, has stolen from Philemon and has run away. In the providence of God, this runaway slave, Onesimus, finds the Apostle Paul and is gloriously converted and has begun assisting Paul and ministering to and with Paul and he's a great blessing. But Paul knows Onesimus has to get this right with his master, Philemon, so he sends Onesimus back to Philemon, and as he sends him back, he sends this letter and he says, "Now, Philemon," you know, they were real close. Philemon and Paul were close. They had a love bond in Christ but he said, "If he owes you anything, I'll take care of it. Charge that to my account."

Then he says, "I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand." Now, normally he would be translating to Luke and Luke would write it down, but he said, "I'm going to put this in my own hand because I want to get this real clear." And I also understand in the ancient world, you were obligated to a debt when you signed it with your own hand. So there are a couple of things going on there. His personal handwriting means, "I'm real serious about what I'm about to say and, secondly, I'm obligating myself."

He said, "I'm writing this with my own hand, I will repay it," and then this phrase, "(not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well)." Now, I'll pay you, Philemon, but you do understand the debt you owe me already. Since I preached the Gospel to you, Philemon, and you've been gloriously converted and under my Bible preaching ministry you've grown and are sanctified, Philemon, as this thing balances out, your debt to me is much greater than my debt to you, even though I'm taking care of Onesimus' robbery of you and his forsaking you." That's what that's saying. Again, the idea of an obligation or a debt.

Then he continues there in Philemon 1:18-20, "Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ." I think what Paul is saying is, "Philemon, from the heart if you treasure the Christ and the truth of the Gospel that I've given to you, then it would just refresh my heart to know you'll just quickly say, 'Don't worry about it, Paul. I do owe you more than Onesimus could ever owe me back.'" But again, no hesitancy of the idea of obligation or debt to the man preaching the word.

Then in 1 Corinthians 9, Paul is writing to a church that because of their carnality and their worldliness, they have been very disgruntled about supporting Paul financially and Paul basically says, "Well, keep it then. I don't want it. You don't have to pay me anything." But he certainly doesn't stop the conversation there. He goes on in verse 9 and just really reams them out for this totally unscriptural, selfish, ungodly attitude they've had toward supporting the man who was functioning really as their pastor.

He gives illustrations like in verse 5, "Do I have not a right to bring along a wife?" His point was, "You should not only support me, you should be joyous about supporting even my wife if I bring along a believing wife." Years ago here at Grace Life Church, when we would invite an evangelist in, we wouldn't even think about his wife and family, and I read this one day and I went to the church and said, "From now on, anybody that we bring in, we're paying for their wife and their kids, everything." You know, because it's right for them to be able to do that.

Well, Paul says, "Others have done that. Should I not be able to do that?" Then he says, "What about a soldier? A soldier doesn't fight at his own expense." Then he goes on, "What about a vineyard keeper? A vineyard keeper doesn't keep the vineyard without some reciprocation out of the vineyard for himself. What about a flock tender." This is verse 7 of 1 Corinthians 9. He says, "A flock tender keeps the flock hoping to gain out of it." Then he says, "Even back there under the law," he said, "the law would tell you you can't muzzle the ox while he's threshing. Let the oxen eat some of the grain." Then he says in verse 10, "A plowman plows in hope. If you hire a plowman, he's plowing for you so that he might get some of the produce out of it too." That's the way the arrangement worked. "The thresher," he says, "would thresh in hope. The priest would bring the offerings in and administer the sacrifice but he also ate; he fed his family out of the sacrifices." His point is: do you not see in all these places? You know you have an obligation and a debt to all these people if they do these things for you. His point is how much more the man who brings you the word of God. A sense of obligation or debt. 1 Corinthians 9:11, he says, "If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?" The idea of obligation and debt is clearly there. 1 Corinthians 9:14, "So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel."

Then referring to the Corinthians and how they would not support him, somebody had to support him because he says in 2 Corinthians 11:8, "I robbed other churches by taking wages from them to serve you." He uses the word "rob" because when you owe a debt, it's criminal not to pay it. He said, in a figure of speech, "It was criminal for me to take money from these other churches when I was spending my time preaching the word to you guys."

You see, financial support of a faithful preaching pastor is not giving to charity. Can I say that emphatically? When you support the preaching pastor, you are not donating to charity, you are paying a debt you owe under God. That's the way you should view it. So we've got this thing mixed up with charity giving. Your support to the church is not

charity giving. When you support your preaching pastor, you're making right on a legitimate debt that you owe. When you walk out of that church and your pastor has exegeted a text of Scripture, he's put his heart, his passion into it, he has striven to preach in the power of the Spirit, when you walk out that door, you owe a debt you can't repay because God's ordained that's the primary means for your justification and your continued sanctification. And I'm sorry, he hasn't changed his means. Your home Bible study, your own exegesis of the Scripture, wonderful and good, it cannot replace the preaching ministry of the church. God has ordained it that way.

You see, it is an important spiritual discipline – now listen to this – it's an important spiritual discipline for church members to both feel the debt and obligation to the faithful preaching ministry, and to fulfill that debt faithfully. I don't want my people just to fulfill it, I want them from the heart to fill it. I want them from the heart to say, "I'm thankful for the preaching of the word of God. It helps me."

I have had so many people and this hasn't been from the beginning because we were carnal and immature as a church in the beginning, but as God matured the body here, I have had statements and expressions like this fairly regularly in my ministry. I might text someone or call them and went by the funeral home this last week, I don't make all of those anymore. There were decades when I went to every single one of those but you just can't do that and keep the energy to faithfully preach, and I'll deal with that more in a moment. But I'll regularly have a church member say something along the lines of, "Pastor, I don't really need you here. I've got all my small group here. There are brothers and sisters caring for me. What I need after this heartbreak is to sit under the preaching of the word next Sunday. That's what I need. That's what I need you to give me."

Actually, I was my own worst enemy in those areas as I, like many of you, thought I was a Catholic priest. You know, if I don't show up and minister, then God hasn't arrived. No, you're called to preach the word of God. You're called to shepherd the flock of God according to the will of God. Your primary. In fact, Paul told Timothy to be up to his ears in the ministry of preaching the word. I don't know, if you're up to your ears, there's not much left for other stuff, but that's shepherding the flock of God according to the will of God. But you can bank on it, until God matures a congregation, Satan is going to have tares in there that will try to tear you up if you don't submit to them and do what they want done in personal ministry. I'm not saying personal ministry is bad. I still do that. I still counsel. I still go to the funeral home. I still do funerals. I still do weddings. But I don't mind saying no. Well, let me say that it's still hard, to be honest. I still feel guilty every time but I know I can't diminish my energies there if I'm going to be what I'm supposed to be here. I'm getting ahead of myself because I'm going to deal with that in a moment.

Let me get back to: pay them well, not just don't wear them out all the time. It is an obligation and a debt biblically speaking. Secondly, the Bible teaches we should be generous. We should be generous. The church at Philippi was a great example of this and Paul so strongly commends them and I want you to follow this. Philippians 4:12, Paul says to them, "I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live

in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need." Paul didn't go out and look for prosperity or abundance but when he found it, he was happy with it. Paul didn't go out looking to spend the night in the Roman prison, but if it happened, it happened. His point was, "Wherever I am, I can just be happy and satisfied there."

Now there's an interesting Greek word. This Greek word that is translated "prosperity," do you see it up there in the first part of the verse? Then having an "abundance" in the second part of the verse? It's the same Greek word one time translated "prosperity" here and the second time translated "abundance," but the word literally means "over and above." So twice in this verse he says, "When people, when churches like the church at Philippi support me, you don't just say, 'Okay, what can we get by with? What is barely enough.'" But he said, "No, when you guys take care of me, I have over and above. I have an abundance literally." I've understood that you can even use this word to translate "luxury." Paul stayed in the homes of some quite wealthy people in some of his church plants, and I guarantee he had the finest suite in the house, at least for that day in that culture.

Then he continues in Philippians 4:18, "But I have received everything in full and have an abundance." Same word again. "I have this over and above amount. I have more than I need." He said, "I am amply supplied," he elaborates a little bit more on that, "having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God." Paul said, "It is well-pleasing to God when you make sure you support your preaching pastor generously." With the church in Philippi, this was continuous and ongoing. They were continuous and ongoing in their generous support of their preaching pastor.

Now in Philemon 22, once again, Philemon and Paul were very close so Paul is writing from prison, you know, and he's tell Philemon, "I'm sending Onesimus back and I'll take care of his debt but now, you owe me more than I could owe you so keep that in mind, Philemon." And then just right off the bat after that, you would think that's almost a contentious discussion he's having with Philemon, he just jumps up and says, "But prepare me a lodging. I want to stay with you when I get there." That would be kind of like me calling one of my church members and saying, "Get your lake house ready. I'm coming next week." He picks out the wealthiest man in the church, Philemon, Philemon had slaves, had a big enough home for the church to meet in it, and he says, "I'm coming to your house to stay."

Now, if Paul was spiritual, he wouldn't do that. If Paul was spiritual, he'd stay in one of the poorest houses and sleep in the hallway to prove his spirituality. Have you ever been around some of these guys who did that? We had a crew come through here one time and if you drove a \$35,000 car, they'd only drive a \$15,000 car. If you got a \$300 suit, they'd only get a \$75 suit. And on and on it went. Their wives suffered. Their children suffered. And every time there was a handout, they were first in line. It was really pitiful but they wore this, "Well, we're doing it for Jesus. We just love Jesus." If you love Jesus, you'll

obey this book and get over your false, arrogant parading of humility and just be real. Just be real.

Now, I've gone to some third world countries to do missions work and in some of those third world countries, you have two options: you can stay in a national hotel with chickens and goats, or you can stay in a 5 star hotel that Western businessmen stay in. Not always, but generally I stay in a 5 star hotel because I've got to get up and preach the next day and be decent and be refreshed. Now, when I say literally chickens and goats, there was a hotel in India that I almost stayed in until a man rescued me and they literally would bring in chickens and goats in off the bus they just got off of. Now, I'm not too good for that, I'm just not used to that. Amen? And I can't get used to that in five days. I want to sleep and I want to rest and I want to be my best the next morning, but do you know what? People may have some problems with that but I've had nobody that I can remember saying, "Pastor, you've been going to the bush of Africa for 11 years," we did that for 11 years here, "and you've been sleeping on the ground or on cots in tents," no air conditioning, no heating, really cold at night, hot in the day, and you're trying to work on a construction project and preach, "you shouldn't do that. You should get somewhere where you can be rested up and be your best." Nobody had a problem with me sleeping on cots in the bush for 11 years. Not 11, but our trip once a year for 11 years. Sleeping on concrete floors in an old church in the hills of Jamaica when we tried to help train their pastors there. They think that's wonderful and spiritual. According to Paul, they are both spiritual. If the opportunity happens that you can go to Philemon's house and have very nice lodging, if God ordains that a very generous church is right with God and pleasing with God and gives you over and above and you have an abundance, wonderful and good, but if God's will means you also have to stay sometimes in a prison cell for the Gospel, that's fine too. Can I get an amen there, guys? But bless God, don't go out looking for the prison cell just to prove your spirituality. You're hurting the cause of Christ. You're representing something that the Scriptures do not agree with.

This kind of reminds me of George Whitefield's ministry. George Whitefield, I believe probably about the greatest evangelist church planter since the Apostle Paul. But George Whitefield had a close relationship with Lady Huntingdon of aristocracy, British aristocracy. She was immensely wealthy, probably be a billionaire in today's terms. He was a person chaplain in her household and actually got some criticism because financially Whitefield did very very well. And I can guarantee you when Whitefield was ministering and he stayed in one of Lady Huntingdon's estates, he lived like royalty. She had servants. She had immense wealth. The finest of foods. But when Whitefield needed to come to the American colonies and sleep on the roadside, he did that too. But the point is the churches are commended for being generous in their support of the man of God.

Here's the verse we often refer to 1 Timothy 5:17-18, "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor," now that's just elders in general. Then he goes to another place, "especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." So he says, "A faithful elder is worthy of double honor but especially those whose main job and they've proven themselves at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,' and 'The labor is worthy of his wages.'" So Paul

says, "We know the Old Testament truth, the laborer is worthy of his wages but," he says, "we're under grace now so we don't just go by that. That's a foundation stone we learn from, the laborer is worthy of wages, but when you get to church elders and when you get to the preaching elder of the church, that's double honor and more." I have not consulted a conservative scholar who does not that this at least includes financial compensation. It's more than that, but it includes financial compensation. Scholars tell us that the word that's translated "double honor" is regularly used referring to the price of an item or pay to a worker, so in the context of the way the word is used in the culture of the day, it clearly referred to financial support.

We know in Acts 28:30 that Paul said "he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters" when he was not working. So Paul had the wealth in the bank to support renting a facility out for two full years and it must have had some size to it because he was welcoming others to come into his Bible study and to his ministry there. So it shows us that he had some significant compensation also.

So your church has a debt and an obligation to compensate you well. God requires it and I believe they can afford it. If you have 10 tithing families in your church, they can pay at least a working wage to the pastor. The problem is they think, "Well, we've got to pay for the nursery. We've got to pay for the children's program," and all of these things that are not even mentioned in Scripture. They're not wrong but when you're paying your pastor and he's struggling and stressed and he's thinking, "How are we going to make ends meet? My wife's got to go to work. I don't know how I'm going to have a college fund for my kids, much less put anything back for retirement." And then you want him to get in the pulpit and be John MacArthur. You're not paying him like John MacArthur is getting paid. I know that for a fact. Be generous. You have a debt and an obligation and you ought to be generous at it and you can afford to do it.

You see, carnal men who run these churches out there and they're stingy toward the pastor, they are not being scriptural, they're being sinful. It's sin. And here's where a lot of us fell as pastors, we need to be faithful to preach that it's sin. Now, certainly we cannot walk into our churches with an air of superiority or an air of elitism and know in one sense, I believe I can say with a clear conscience when I started at this church, they paid me \$50 a week. I worked just as hard then as I work today. So wherever it is and wherever you start, that's what you've got to deal with but you've got to help instruct the people in the truth.

I'll try to squeeze in what I can with my time. There is that notion out there that, "Well, it's God who does the work. It's not the man. It's all of grace anyway so it's permissible to be stingy toward the preaching pastor because it's really all about God." That is so radically unscriptural. Do you understand if you honor God and you honor the preaching of the word, the Bible requires you honor the vessel God uses to preach the word.

Pay them well. II. Let them rest. A pastor's got to learn to rest. And again, this bleeding over of the error of Catholicism that the pastor is some sort of a 24/7 priest and he's got to be available for every counseling situation, every need, every hospital situation, every

bereavement, every crisis, every loss, and every one of those things because you love the people. I love my people. There's not a time when my people are hurting that it doesn't tug on my heart. It's been one of the hardest things because in the early years, I did every one of those because that's what we're supposed to do, and it's just really hard for me to pull away and not do all of those. I do some of them but I can't do all of them anymore. The staff does a good job but our body ministers to each other in such a wonderful way. Here's what I'm saying: every time you minister to somebody whose broken and hurting and grieving or going through a crisis, it drains your heart. It drains your heart and so though you're not preaching, you're not resting. You're draining.

I'll never forget Brother Jono Sims sitting down here, and he and I were each other's therapist sometimes on things pertaining to church work and church life. Brother Jono helped me and I think I told him this, he had gone through a long season of a discipline issue in his church that was as difficult and tumultuous and just hard to go through as anything I've heard of, and at the end of that season through a series of events, he basically told his men, he said, "Guys, I have to have some downtime." He just said that word "downtime." Brother, we were on the phone when you told me that and that spoke to me huge because I didn't understand downtime. I didn't understand that when I was away from the church, I could take the work with me and I really wasn't getting any downtime and he helped me. He said, "I've got to disengage." Look, Jono Sims is as strong a man as you're going to find. Period. He can handle more than 95% of the pastors I know but even he, like myself, has come to realize, "If I'm going to be faithful to God and good for my people, I've got to get away."

So his men gave him six weeks and I'm glad they gave it to him in deer season. I know that is funny in a way, but that's not the point, the point is he had something to pour his energy into that got him away from the draining work of ministry for a while and you've got to find out what helps you get that downtime.

Let's remind ourselves that rest is ordained of God. That's subpoint A: rest is ordained of God. In Exodus 20, the Bible talks about, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God." So listen: before the fall of man, God rested on the seventh day. It's an ordinance of God. And then under the law, they were commanded to take a day of rest. And then in the New Testament, we see the principle further amplified. So resting was ordained before the fall. Resting was taught under the law. And resting is taught after the law in the age of grace.

Subpoint B here under "let them rest" is: Jesus leads his ministers to rest. Mark 6:31-32, "And He said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while.'" He had sent his guys out in the ministry. I think it's about a day and a half here or so, they come back in and immediately Jesus leads his men to a secluded place for some downtime. For some rest. The Bible says, "They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves." Are you listening to me, pastors? They literally got away from the people they were ministering to and on the orders of Jesus Christ, they separated from the very people they're supposed to care for. Now, your carnal people in the church, "Well,

he doesn't care. He's not available." No, he cares so he makes himself refreshed so he can be the best he can in the pulpit.

One scholar said that the Gospels record 11 times that Jesus intentionally retreated from the people in order to get the rest he needed – now listen to me – to fulfill his Father's will. Now, he could have hung around and fulfilled the people's will and never gotten any rest because they always wanted another free meal and another miracle. That would have never ended. Amen? 24/7 they would have been asking for that, but that's not the main reason he came.

Jesus leads his ministers into battle and he leads his ministers into rest, and some of you guys need to repent of not seeking proper rest so you can be effective in the pulpit. We don't need you falling out when you're 45 or 50 because you've been unbalanced and unbiblical. We need you preaching strong into your 80s and you'll do a million-fold more good for the very people you're trying to minister to by doing that balanced ministry than if you overload yourself early on.

I used to think I could do it all and I tried and I about ruined my health. I think I've got issues today from my own pride. It wasn't my people. There were some but it wasn't my people so much as it was me thinking I had to do it all. Don't get in that trap.

During Jesus' last week of ministry, he went into Jerusalem during the day and taught, but do you know what he did at night? He went out to the Mount of Olives. Do you know what the Mount of Olives is? It's actually a farm. It's a little olive farm outside of the city, because it was a secluded place he could get away from the ministry for a while. Every night during that last week before his crucifixion, he would go out to an olive farm and Gethsemane meant just a little press area, the olive press area, but he'd go out to that farm with his disciples so they could get some R&R and get refreshed to be effective for the Lord and the next day's ministry.

Are you faithful to work for God in the preaching of the word? Are you also faithful to rest when needed? I honestly didn't know what stress was, I didn't know when I got under stress, and I had to learn some of that the hard way and I'm trying to help you learn it without learning it the hard way. But here's something I want you to understand here: preaching is heart work. If you're just preaching with your head, you're not preaching. Preaching captivates, engages to the greatest degree the heart and the soul of a man. If that's not true, I don't think he's called to preach. I'm telling you, on Monday morning when I begin for the next week's sermon, I put that sermon on and I wear it all week long and it works on me.

And I've told my people. Here's another thing, pastors: I have the most supportive, wonderful, loving people. It's just the truth. But they don't get it. They won't get it unless they're called to preach. They don't get it. Now, I'm not saying they have to get it and I'm not saying they treat me wrong because they don't get it, but don't expect anybody to get it unless they're a preacher. You know, everything that I find written in the New Testament about a pastor's needs and how to take care of a pastor was written by a

preacher, the Apostle Paul. Do you know why? Because he gets it. He knew if he just left it up to the laymen in the church, they'd never get it. But he got it and that's why he writes these things and gives us these things.

Preaching is heart work. Nothing depletes the emotional reserves and nothing drains the soul of energy like faithfully preaching the word of God in the power of the Spirit. Did you hear that? Nothing does. And if you do not separate yourself from other things that also drains your heart energy, then you'll begin to mount the pulpit as a weak, broken instrument. Oh, I've seen that so many times. I've seen so many good men that I know loved the Lord, loved the word, but they get in the pulpit and the fire is gone. The passion is gone. And you know, it's not really their fault, it's the people out there who have put on them 1,001 things other than what their Master told them to do and so by the time he gets ready to get ready to preach and preach, their emotional heart reserves are depleted because they've spent all week long in all kinds of caring, important ministries, they're just not the one who ought to be doing all of that. They've expended themselves on other things. They didn't get any downtime. They didn't get an refreshment and all of a sudden they get up to preach exhausted and tired and heart-drained and it's just not like it ought to be.

So when you think about rest and you think about downtime, it's not just necessarily not preaching for a week. You cannot preach but still not get any good downtime. You've got to get good rest that replenishes you for a strong pulpit ministry and some of you are going to have to take your pastors in a headlock. In a headlock and say, "Pastor, you're gonna learn to do this because God uses you to help us grow and I want you to be around a long time. So you're gonna have to learn to take some downtime." Pastor, are you listening? Now I'm preaching to Brother Jeff this morning. Are you listening to me? All this nonsense about you not taking a rest is 100% carnal pride. That's all it is. God says you need the rest, you're proud and you think you're smarter and stronger than God.

Now, I know we've got the arguments, "Well, pastors are lazy." Look, if he's lazy, fire him but if he's a man of God and he's trying to do right, make sure you let him rest. We used to go on vacations. It's not so much anymore but when we'd go on vacations, my wife would plead to me, "Jeff, let's don't go to church on Sunday." Oh! That's what I thought but this wicked woman I've married, a problem here. She said, "Here's what's happened, we're on vacation, you're trying to relax and we enjoy having you back for a little while because we get you on vacation. You kinda let your hair down. So on the way to church, here you start, 'I wonder what they're gonna greet like and what the parking lot looks like? Where's the Welcome Center? How are they doing that? Why does that guy preach that way? He's just out of context. What are you doing that for? Why did he say that? That church is so shallow.' Then for the rest of vacation, you're gone. You're gone. You're in work mode. You're just all bound up." Because I am and to be honest, she was right because preaching engages me in my work. Church life engages me. Now I've gotten better where I can go to churches now and just hear the preaching of the word and relax some but for a long time I couldn't. You have to decide. Does that help me rest? Or is it getting me all bound back up again?

Now listen, God's calling and God's grace for the pastorate doesn't mean you have a superhuman capacity emotionally. Did you hear that? You don't have this superhuman capacity to care for all these people then very emotionally pour yourself into preaching the word. You don't have any greater capacity than anybody else. God's grace and calling did not give you a superhuman capacity in these areas. What it does mean is that you have a divine capacity to say no to many lesser ministries that you might do what your Master commanded you to do for the church, preach the word. That's the challenge. You have been given the grace to have the wisdom to say no. I love you. I care for you but I can't do that.

I remember three decades ago, the elders and I went to a John MacArthur conference in Chattanooga, TN and in the Q&A at the end of the conference, a pastor said, "John, you've talked about all this time, all these hours, all this energy it takes to preach the word, you can't give yourself to other things or in a very limited way, at best." The guy said, "John, if I do that, my church wants me to do this, and this, and this, how do I deal with that?" He said, "You tell them that's not your job." I never got over that. That's not your job.

You must learn to take the harness off. You know, I talked with one of my brothers who's worked in the logging woods with work horses and he said in the mornings when we go out and get that work horse at daybreak, we put the harness on and he said when you put that harness on, you can just see it in his eyes. You can see it in the horse's countenance. He knows it's on. He tightens up. He knows he'll get the whip if he don't obey and as long as that harness is on, he knows it's work time and he's tightened up. He said then at the end of the day, it's the most interesting thing, when we take him back to the barn, a little corral around the barn, and we take that harness off of that work horse, he said for five minutes he'll buck and jump and run and he'll roll in the dirt, and then when he gets through doing that, it's like he just stops and goes, "Phew." Because he's worked hard all day long.

I said, "What would happen, do you think, if you worked that work horse like that every day, you put that harness on and he tightens up and he gets ready, trudges hard all day long, but in the evening you took him away from the work but you left the harness on? If you left the harness on when he's supposed to be resting?" He said, "It would probably kill him because he's just conditioned to stay tightened up and he can't relax. He can't get the rest he wants." And I think that's what happens to a lot of pastors, is you get away from preaching a little while but then you strap on other things. You've got to learn to have some downtime, some true rest time.

I think one of the reasons why we have to rest and sleep is because God doesn't. "He who keeps Israel neither sleeps nor slumbers." You need to rest because you need to remind yourself, "I'm not God. I am weak and he is strong." Your people need to know you need rest because you're not God. You're weak and he is strong. I know there are some wives sitting here right now and you're not crying on the outside, you're crying on the inside because you see it. You see it.

I'm going to quit. I've got a lot more but I'm going to quit. A couple more statements. Folks in your church are going to say, "Well, I'm tired too. I'm worn out too. I'm hurting too." And do you know what? We need to feel for those folks. We need to love them and encourage them, try to help them in their need of balance. But there's an important distinction. If Sister Sally comes to church worn out and tired and full of anxiety, it has very little effect on the souls, the eternal souls of church members, but if your pastor mounts a sacred desk to open the word of God, the primary means God's ordained for justification and sanctification of the sheep, and he's tired and weary and anxiety-ridden and disheartened, then that's jeopardizing the souls, the eternal souls of men and women and boys and girls. You see, the one thing that weary Sister Sally needs is a refreshed, Spirit-filled, expositional message from the word of God. Are you hearing me?

I'm going to go ahead and go here. That's one of the problems I have with the so-called family integrated church movement. We believe in having a church integrated family. Think about that for a minute. But anyway, this concept that somehow it's spiritual to keep your small children with you in the service, have you ever spent any time with a lady with small kids? She's about ready to jump off the River Bridge over here going into Florence. She's tired. She's worn out. She's discouraged. They get depressed. It's hard. And then the one thing, the one thing, the one thing, the one thing they must have, the ministry of the word, then you throw them in church and say, "Okay, fight them for an hour and a half during the preaching of the word. Wrestle with them for an hour and a half during the preaching of the word." And they don't get to separate for a while and just say, "O God, help me! I'm discouraged. God, help me! I'm depressed." The best thing you can do for a lady with small children is love those babies for an hour and a half and let her sit on the pew and be fed the word of God. That'll make her a better momma.

Now look, I know there are some good folks that got in that movement, and I know there's balance there, and I don't mean to say they're all wicked. That's not my point, but my point is the preaching of the word of God is what we all have to have and you've got to know that your pastor is refreshed as he can be because our souls, my wife's soul, my children's souls, my grandbabies' souls are on the line because God has not ordained any other primary means other than the preaching of the word to win them and keep them for eternity. Pastor, don't rob us! Be refreshed when you get in the pulpit! We need God's word! Let everything else go but that's what we need.

Hebrews 13:17, Paul writing to the church among the Hebrews said, "Obey your leaders and submit to them." Why? Because they have a different responsibility. You've got to understand their responsibility is different than anybody else's. They're going to give an account. They watch over your souls in a way nobody else is called to do. The thing is not really about pastoral authority, though the Bible teaches pastoral authority. It's about pastoral responsibility. God has given them a responsibility that's heavy so they deserve you to submit to them and obey them.

"They keep watch over your souls, they'll give an account." Then he says, "Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." If your pastor gets in the pulpit and he's tired and weak and weary and beaten down and disheartened

and troubled, that's not good for you. But if he gets in the pulpit and says, "My people love the word. My people love me. They're not beating me up if I didn't jump through hoops." All the subjective carnal ideas every church member has "that their pastor ought to do if he's really loving and compassionate," and so he feels beat up by that all week long so he doesn't have the refreshed heart to preach like he ought to, then what he's saying is, "If you let your pastor get in the pulpit like that, you're going to suffer." And you can sit there all day long with your arrogance and say, "Well, I tell you what, he's no better than I am. Da, da, da." That's fine. I know what you're saying but what you don't understand is God has not ordained any other means to even come close to the means of preaching the word for the saving of your souls. So you're doing yourself a favor, is what he's saying.

I'm going to have to cut this thing off but let me close with this statement. I think a pastor at minimum must take one day per week to just get away. I don't know what: golf, fish, hunt. Do something. Do something. Find out that thing and your wife will tell you what it is if you'll listen to her. Find that thing that really disengages you.

I'm going to be careful here but, wives, a little romance on that off day helps. That's part of your ministry. That's a great way to rejuvenate his spirit. That love, that tenderness. That's all I'm going to say.

A pastor needs one, at least one full day a week. He needs at minimum, minimum, three weeks a year away. Away. If you've got to give him money to get him away, do it. We've done that here more than once for pastors because we don't want a guy here handling the word and helping us who's gone through a difficult season and we just keep grinding him down. He's no better than anybody else, it's just that his responsibility is more important.

In addition to one day per week and a minimum, I mean a minimum. I don't know of anybody on our staff that gets three weeks a year. They all get more than that and I make them take it. I've got a good staff. They work hard but I want them to be their best.

In addition to those things, I would strongly recommend two weeks of study break per year. Two weeks where they can get away and not have their marching boots on, their work boots on when they open the Bible but have their slippers on when they open the Bible. Just do some light reading and studying and praying, kind of planning their next exposition, maybe, a little bit. But that's not vacation. I usually take two weeks of vacation and two weeks of study break back-to-back because typically after two weeks of vacation, I'm finally just kind of rejuvenated and then I can jump into the study break and almost always the conference is planned during that study break.

Then our church offers sabbaticals, multi-month sabbaticals every 10 years of service. That's not enough but I haven't taken one yet so I'm not doing all that I'm telling you you ought to be doing. But some regular intervals of extended time away are healthy.

I'll never forget one of the first times I went to Dr. MacArthur's church and when he got to the pulpit, everybody started clapping. I thought, "Well, that's interesting." Nobody has

ever clapped for me when I got up to preach on Sunday. So I asked some of the guys who were there, I said, "What's this all about?" They said, "Well, he's been gone." I think it was nine months. "He's been out of the pulpit nine months. He's just been studying and doing some writing." So you wonder why these guys get in their 70s and 80s and they're still fresh, their churches are taking care of them. The same thing with Dr. Piper. I remember going to John Piper's church, the same thing. I had to watch when I'd go because he had several months annually he'd take away from his preaching ministry to stay fresh.

Now look, I'm in my 37th year and you can't start this way. I know that, but you've got to begin teaching these principles. It's part of your pastoral ministry to teach your people these things also so when you're 37, you're like Jeff Noblit, because I'm not special. You've still got some passion and some invigoration and some vision because you're not just slap wore out, and that requires a church paying you well and letting you rest. Can I get a good amen there?