

The Church Member's Assignment

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Well, as you're being seated, grab your Bibles and go to 1 Corinthians 16. If you are new around here, we, well, let me just say it this way, the mainstay of our pulpit, I guess 95% of the time, is expositional preaching, verse by verse, chapter by chapter through books of the Bible and we've gone through many many many books together and we completed, what, 5 ½ years in the Gospel of Luke and now I'm touching on some things that bear repeating, if you will. We have concluded the family assignments but there are some closely related assignments and I think for the next few weeks unless the Lord changes me, I'm going to visit some of those related assignments and 1 Corinthians 16 is our text for today.

As you know, many years ago when you voted as a church that our vision statement would be to be a biblical church that God might use as an example for others and God has answered that prayer and that quest, if you will, in that he's allowed us to have a relationship with many others and one of the things that I do a lot of the time is try to help the leading men in churches know how to take care of their pastor. You do a good job there and I thank God for you. I'm not saying you've done yet because what happens is the generation that took care of their pastor begins to fall away and the next generation hasn't been disciplined in how to take care of their pastor and it's a very thoroughly taught principle in Scripture. And three things that I run into all of the time that even in our good church, good brothers and sisters who love the Lord and love sound doctrine, there is a woeful deficiency in the congregation, especially the leading men knowing how to take care of their pastor.

I counseled with a pastor this week, well, maybe a little over a week ago, and he has been in Gospel ministry 45 years and he was sharing that he was just struggling; that it's just, it's hard to stay invigorated and full of passion and conviction and preach the way he needs to and I say, "Well, brother, how many Sundays off do you get a year?" He said, "I get two weeks a year." Do you anybody in a leadership overseeing position that only gets two weeks a year break? How do you think your Crimson Tide football team would do if they only got two weeks off a year. It would just get mundane; it would just get old. And his men are good men but they don't know how to take care of their pastor.

And he's like another pastor out west from here that I've worked with his men sometime ago who was just...and this guy is a go-getter. He is a type A hard worker. He was in his

15th year of the pastorate and called me and basically said, "You need to help me. Tell me about when you take your two week study break and two weeks of vacation every July. I've got to have some down time." And I said, "Well, let me meet with your men." And I went and met with his men and when I got through, they gave him a bunch of money and five weeks off. I love doing that but do you know what? He's worth it. It's not about him, it's about your souls being fed by a man that's not worn out, tired and defeated and churches have got to get that. I mean, I know you get that more than most but they don't get it and I see it over and over and over a time.

So the amount of days away to refresh and replenish and refuel that is so essential – listen to me – preaching is heart work. It drains the emotions of a man like nothing else and if you don't replenish that, then you're preaching with a broken tool. And it doesn't matter, "Well, I tell you what, I don't get three weeks off. I don't know why he should get a month." That's fine, but the souls of you and your children, your grandchildren, are not on the line if you're not affected, but God has ordained the preaching of the word as primary and a foundational means to your salvation and your well-being so you're helping yourself by making sure he's all he can be. So time off is one of the things and just down time that is needed to replenish is so misunderstood by even good churches.

Secondly, the definition of the pastor's job. How many sermon after sermon after sermon in my earlier years did I preach about the role of the pastor biblically speaking and how you have to release the man of God who's your pastor/teacher from a dozen, I should say, dozens I should say, of other tasks and responsibilities so he will have a heart full when he gets up to preach for you. That's so many and to be honest, I put myself in this camp, a lot of pastors are their own worst enemies. They try to do everything and please everyone and be involved in everything. I remember the year after year after year, every children's event, every student event, every college event, every singles event, every event of any kind of event, the Senior Pastor had to be right in the middle of it or "you didn't care." Then it comes Friday night and you're absolutely worn out and you're trying to cram. I can't tell you the weekends, it wasn't your fault, it was mine, I can't tell you the weekends, God is my witness, I spent upwards to 15 hours on Saturday studying and all Sunday afternoon so I would feel like I'm prepared because I didn't consider all the busy work during the week as really work. It was just two separate things and pastors get in that trap. Look, real glory of God focused, Christ honoring, Bible saturated, soundly convicted pastors are very rare.

We've got to take care of them and you do a good job of that so let me, I'm going to officially commission you, Grace Life Church of the Shoals, as the special refreshers to the pastors we associate with. And any of these guys and we've been doing this for years and we're going to do this moreso, we're going to give these pastors like a weekend off and here's what I do: I call their men and say, "We want to take care of them. We want to put them up. We're going to feed them. We just want them to be replenished but you have to give them a Sunday off and not count it against their regular time off." And so far they've been willing to do that. So when they come in, I want you just to love them and refuel them and refresh them and replenish them.

So days off, the definition of the pastor's job is another one, and then the salary of pastors. Just this morning talking about one of our partnership churches, well able to take good care and the pastor and his wife are stressed out just over the A, B, C's of paying their bills. You can say, "Well, I'll tell you what, I have a tough time too. I don't know why he shouldn't have a tough time." Well, first of all, I wish you didn't have a tough time but, listen, if the man of God is stressed over just paying his bills, getting his kids in a decent school or whatever it is, then he's not able to minister to you from the word like he needs to and God has ordained that's a primary means of your justification and your sanctification. So this foolish carnal idiocy of, "Well, I don't get to do that."

It's not about that, it's about the ministry of the word being unhindered and somehow in God's grace you folks have done a good job in that sense and I've told you this for many years and I said this a lot early on in my ministry, "Leave me free, give me an unfettered pulpit, leave me free to preach the word of God to you, don't put a lot of restraints and requirements at the..." Now, if anything is in the Bible, I'll gladly take those restraints and those requirements but not a lot of man-made baptistic evangelical traditions and to be quite honest, a whole of it came over from Catholicism, the priestcraft of Catholicism has crept into all evangelicalism and priestcraft teaches that the priest has to be everywhere because when he shows up, he administers God's grace. "Oooo. Here he comes." And it's a false doctrine. Do you know where God's grace comes from primarily? The preaching of this word. That's where you understand and receive and grasp God's grace. And I asked you for an unfettered pulpit that I would have that kind of energy and here's what I said, "Then you get on your knees and say, 'God, we're taking good care of him. We're releasing him. We don't want him to have anxieties over a dozen other things. But, God, you'd better give us a man of God in that pulpit.'" Amen? Take God up on it, and I can say going in my 36th year on staff, actually 37 or so years I've been here, but my 36th year on staff, I believe God has honored that biblical perspective. Amen? I know he's done that. I know he's done that.

And even though certainly there were times, I believe and, brothers, you know I love you but some of our men in leadership maybe didn't grasp how to, now maybe I was difficult. Now don't laugh too much there. They perhaps did not grasp how to say, "Pastor, you're getting away. You're getting out of here." Do you...for like 20 years, every time we took a vacation I took my study work with me. That was so wrong and I did have some men say, "Pastor, stop doing that." I just didn't get it. But my mistakes and our mistakes can enable us to do a better job.

So we're going to talk this morning about the Church Member's Assignment and, of course, primarily how it relates to their pastor and in our case, their pastors, plural. The Church Member's Assignment. Now, obviously there are dozens of things that can be said from the word about what a church member is to be doing and what he is to be, or she is to be involved in and what your responsibilities are, but – now listen to me – if you get down who you're to work under and who you're to answer to, everything else tends to fall in place. You can say a lot of things about what a child is to do and be but if the child gets down that, "God's put me under my parents," and he'll honor and respect that, everything else tends to fall in place. There are a lot of things you can say about a wife's

role and responsibility but if she can get it in her heart and rest that, "God has put me under the headship of my husband," then everything else tends to fall in place.

So we're going to look at the church members, the church's assignment, primarily how it relates to their relationship with their pastor. Let's look at it together here and this is a unique text in 1 Corinthians 16 because this actually a newer church plant and they as yet do not have men assigned to the office of pastor or elder. Now, the word "pastor/elder" are two words for the same office. Elder emphasizes the overseeing and authority of the office, pastor emphasizes the shepherding nature of his work. He shepherds them with the word to go on with God. But this church hasn't got pastors assigned yet but they do have some leaders and so as Paul is functioning as the pastor, even though he's an apostle, he is slowly watching the leadership teams develop in these churches and he writes to the church, 1 Corinthians 16, beginning in verse 10. Yeah, let's do 10. He says,

10 Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am. 11 So let no one despise him. But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren. 12 But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity. 13 Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. 14 Let all that you do be done in love.

Now here we go, verse 15,

15 Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), 16 that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. 17 I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part. 18 For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.

So Paul writes to the church at Corinth and he says, "There are some men who have just shown that they are uniquely dedicated and they work hard in the work and though they're not yet in the office of pastor or elder, I'm convinced later they were assigned to that office." Now, everything that we know from Scripture is: former leaders assigned the new leaders of the church. Now, we're more democratic here and I think that's good and biblical, but in Paul's day, the apostles or his associates appointed the elders in every church. So these men, Stephanas, Achaicus, Fortunatus, are not yet in the office of apostle but yet Paul requires them to show a lot of respect, honor and obedience to those men because right now they are the leaders of the church.

So, first of all, I. you're to respect them. That's how you're to treat your pastor and pastors. You're to respect them. As a matter of fact, as Paul writes to this church at Corinth and we remind ourselves that the church at Corinth was an immature church and

they were prone to err, so as Timothy is coming to them, he says back up in verse 10, "if Timothy comes, you see to it that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord's work." Now, Timothy was young and probably could be intimidated and Paul has to remind the church at Corinth, in effect reading between the lines, here's what he's saying, "Now, you know you guys can be unruly and disrespectful and unyielding to leadership. You know you've got a record there, and especially if he's a young guy." So he says, "When Timothy comes, I know he's young but you make sure you show him the respect he's due so that he'll not have cause to be afraid." That's exactly what he's saying, "Make sure you respect him." So Timothy is young and shy and Paul has to make sure he exhorts them, "Show him that proper respect that he deserves."

Now, 1 Thessalonians 5. This should be on your screen as a parallel truth that I want us to look at here together and we begin looking in verse 12, "But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another." Now, first of all, he says to the church at Thessalonica in like spirit as he's saying to the church at Corinth, "Respect those who are over you in the Lord. Appreciate them." That means to recognize them and let them know you appreciate them. He says, "They diligently labor among you." It means their full heart and full time is dedicated to this task. There is nothing wrong with being bi-vocational but there are times as a church grows that God gives a man in the church the means whereby a man can give his full heart and his full time to that task. And he says, "they have charge over you in the Lord." He said, "These are those who are put before you. They are put there to stand in front and be an example for you to follow. They are not to be lording over the flock for their own sake or advantage, but they are over you to the end that the whole flock honors and glorifies the Lord as he sees fit." Then he says, "They instruct you." That means that is the primary activity of this overseeing pastor/shepherd, is that he is to preach to you and teach to you the truths of God's word for application in your lives and application in church life. Then he says to "esteem them very highly." It's like he adds amplification on amplification. That means beyond measure or exceedingly. But that also would include, of course, compensation. In 1 Timothy 5:17, it says, "Let the elder who works hard, especially those who labor in the word and in doctrine, be considered worthy of double honor."

You know, through the years as I've dealt with churches, I have heard report after report and seen and experienced people complaining about, "Well, what are y'all paying your pastor or your pastors?" as if, "Let's make sure we don't pay them too much." You know, there is not a word in the Bible about that. There is not a caution in the Bible to a church, "Make sure you don't overpay your pastor." But there is clear admonition to make sure you pay well your pastor, even the phrase, make sure he's considered worthy of double honor in these areas. And I thank you that you have had a heart to do that. You've had a heart and spirit to be generous and joyous to your whole staff and I praise the Lord for that, but that is certainly not true across the board. There is this thing of men in the deaconate perhaps, or on the finance committee and they will lay out the church budget and they'll say, "Well, we've got to have this for the nursery," though there is no nursery in the Bible. It's not wrong but it's just not there. "We've got to have this for the children's

program, this for the student program and this for this program and this for this activity," all of which are not supported scripturally, though they are not wrong. "We've got to pay for this and this building and that kind of building." No, the one thing the Scripture requires is you to be very generous and even double honor toward your pastor and it's almost like the personnel expense of the budget is laid over here as one of a dozen things we have to be concerned about as if we're running a business. You do not do the church budget like a business. You start with God's priority and then let everything else fall in line.

Again, I commend you. You've had a heart to do this but it's in my heart because I spend so much energy with our churches helping them in these areas and it's like the light does go off but it takes a lot of preaching and teaching for men to get over their stigmas and their predispositions from a carnal perspective and get into a biblical viewpoint here. Sometimes I challenge our elders as we'll start our finance thing because we have some elders who are very good businessmen, have a lot of experience, I say, "Brothers, these things are helpful," and by the way, they're with me 110%, "but at times you're going to have to take off that businessman executive accountant hat and you're going to have to put on the Bible hat. This is what the Lord says here and we're going to honor that."

So respect for the pastor of the church is expected from church members. Now, he goes further there, not only just respect them but tied into that, II. submit to them. Paul goes on as he's talking to this newer church plant in Corinth and he says, "Now, there is Stephanas and there are others, Fortunatus, Achaicus," and verse 15 he says, no, verse 16 rather, "and I want you also to be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the works and in labors." The word "subjection" there is the idea of putting yourself under. As a matter of fact, the Thayer's Lexicon of the Greek language, kind of the old standby definition, dictionary rather, says this means "to subject one's self; to obey; to submit to another's control; to yield to one's admonition or advice."

So Paul writes to the church at Corinth and says, "You're just getting going. I know you don't have the office of elder but nevertheless there are some men who seem to be distinguished in leading you in that spirit and you are to put yourself in subjection under them." Listen, God means for everything to be done decently and in order. There are structures and systems for orderly function in the church, in the home, and in the culture that God has ordained and we represent to the world the clearest picture of God when – listen – when we embrace and celebrate God's wisdom in these things, not man's wisdom. Now, you know what man's wisdom is, it's constantly every-changing. We don't even know what men and women are anymore in our culture. I mean, it's just a gross, perverse, warped, mutating mess if you leave it up to what Francis Schaeffer would have called sociological law where the society just tries to figure out what's best instead of what American used to be, which is a culture founded on the Judeo-Christian ethic or the truths of the Old and New Testament.

So you have been and I'm not preaching to you complaining or even reproving you but you have been a church that has said, "We are going to cast off the flesh, the way men might approach this, the way factious or fault-finding or power-grubbing men might try

to control things. We're going to try to lash ourselves to, 'What saith the Scripture?' in the way that the church functions and the way the church takes care of the man of God."

Now, if I could back up just a little bit, back up to 1 Thessalonians 5. Tommy, can you put that back up there and verse 14 is what I'm looking for. In all of this exhortation while he is telling these folks at the church at Thessalonica to, what is the wording? To appreciate those who labor among you; they have charge over you; they give you instruction; you esteem them very highly in love. You are to show all that respect then he says, look, "We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly." Now, what is the context? He means those who want to get out of line; those who want to, "Well, we're going to meet over here this afternoon." Do you remember those days, Grace Life Church? "We're going to meet over here this afternoon because we don't agree with" Remember we used to have that kind of stuff? I'm glad you can't remember. I'm glad it's been a long time. Now, let me say as one of the elders in this church: if you've got a concern or a burden, we will listen to you with love but you do understand if you're not showing us a very clear biblical violation, we have a 1,000 different opinions because we've got almost 1,000 different members. So that's why you have leaders because you can't just go by whoever the loudest opinion sharer is. But you've never...well, we haven't functioned that way in many years. But he says to admonish those who would break rank and become disorderly and deviate from the prescribed order God has ordained for the proper functioning of his church.

Well, thirdly, not only does Paul teach the Scriptures very clearly bear out, you are to respect your pastor and pastors, you are to submit to them, fall up under them, follow them, thirdly, you're to bless them. You're to be a blessing back to them. Look at verse 12 of 1 Corinthians 16 right quick. He says, "But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity." Now, reading between the lines and knowing all that's already been taught in 1 Corinthians, here's what we know. There was a bad party spirit in this church; a bad tendency to say, "Our group believes this. Well, our group believes this. Well, our group believes this." And when you have a bad party spirit in a church, what they usually do is pick out a staff member and one says, "Well, this is our favorite guy and we're going to go to...he's our champion. We're going to fight for him. We're going to form a group around him." Another group says, "No, we're about this..." Do you remember the verse? "I am of Paul. I am of Apollos." Remember that's what the Corinthians were doing? Then another group, they were real spiritual, "Well, we're of Christ."

And so there was this fighting among these separative groups and evidently by this time, Paul or rather Apollos was sick of it. Now, they really liked Apollos because he was a great orator. When he got in the pulpit, man, he just woo, the ladies would swoon and the men would say, "Man, I wish I could speak like Apollos." And Apollos was disgusted with that. He wanted them to love Christ, not his gifts and so I think that's what you're getting to here where Apollos says, "I don't want to show back up and feed their flesh where they are trying to exalt me and form a division in the church around me." And so Apollos tells Paul, "I'm not interested in going." He doesn't believe that returning now

would help them trust the Lord so Apollos is not blessed, he's not encouraged by the conduct of the church at Corinth.

Let me say to you I understand preacher worship, I understand people make idols out of the man in the pulpit and I can tell you one of the best ways to lose a man of God is to make an idol out of him. Just like Apollos said, "I'm not coming back for a while. I'm tired of that." But – now listen – the best way to bless the man of God is to love Jesus but respect the instrument God gave you to teach him about Jesus. There is a balance there because – now listen, listen, so much I can't get to – God does not allow you in Scripture to say, "Well, it's all about Jesus and it's all about his word. He can use any minister." That's true, he's going to prove that to you one day by getting rid of me and getting you somebody else better, I mean, you know I'm not going to live forever. So that's true, it's not the man but the Scripture requires if you're to respect and honor God's word and the Gospel, I expect you, the Bible teaches, to respect and honor the instrument I gave you to bring you the Gospel. That's why you show him double honor. That's why you respect him. That's why you love him. That's why you hold him in high esteem because of the role God has given him for God's glory and for your sake. Now, we're going to get to that in just a moment.

Now, crossing over to a good cross reference here under your responsibility to bless the pastor God gives you is Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account." Now look, "Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." Joy simply means joy; it means delight; it means gladness. I've said this many times but in these latter years of my ministry here, I'm telling you, you are the kind of people that give your preaching pastor's heart joy and gladness. Now, I have ministered here for years when it was deep deep grief. I know that feeling. And as I've said before, quite honestly I've had to humble myself and repent and learn and grow and I'm very very grateful to you for letting me grow with you and learn and mature and I don't think I'm through yet, by the way, and I don't think you are either but we can keep growing together, amen?

But it has been my joy because you are the kind of people that give your pastor joy and one of the reasons why is that you are a giving church, you're not a taking church. The modus operandi in most of your hearts, especially those in leadership, not that it's not in others but I know the ones in leadership better, is that you come into church thinking, "What can I do? How can I serve? How can I minister?" Not, "What is he or this staff member going to do for me?" You're givers, not takers. Have you ever noticed, are you listening to your pastor this morning? If you go through life purposing to serve others, you always can be happy but if you go wanting, taking, wanting, taking, "I'd better get this. I'd better get that," you're going to be miserable. Thank you for being a giving church, generally speaking, not a taking church.

I remember a small group sharing the example of, and I'm not going to give the lady's name, but for eight weeks they ministered to this lady who had a sickness, all kind of food ministry, help in every way, and she complained that the food, some of it, was not home made. You know, you talk about being a grief not only to the pastor but a grief to

the small group that had so diligently labored to serve. Thank you for being givers and not takers. And an old acrostic that we've talked about before, what I want you to be is FAT, f-a-t, fat. You say, "Well, pastor, I'm doing pretty good there. I'm working pretty good there." Faithful, Available and Teachable. Faithful, available and teachable.

IV. The reason. The reason the Bible says. We've hit on some of these but for a little bit more, we'll talk about the reason you respect, submit to and bless your church pastors. He says in verse 10 here as he's talked about "make sure that Timothy feels blessed when he comes," that's what he's saying anyway, he says in verse 10, he says, the last part, "or he is doing the Lord's work." So in our outline here A would be: for the Lord's sake. You don't respect Jeff Noblit or submit to Jeff Noblit or bless Jeff Noblit primarily for Jeff Noblit, you do it for the Lord's sake. As I represent him and I am his servant for you, you do it for the Lord's sake.

It was many many years ago we were having some explosive growth here, well, we were adding a lot of numbers at one time; some of it wasn't so, growth wasn't so good but we were adding a lot of numbers and I hadn't been pastoring all that long and the finance committee gave me a really large raise based on, you know, we use an average survey from all across the country of what other churches of our size and offerings pay their staff, and anyway, I said, "My goodness, I don't think I deserve that." And one of the elders said, "No, you don't deserve it, we're just giving you double honor." And I thought, "Well, I've never even heard that before," but that's exactly what he said. His point was, "It's for the Lord's sake. It's not about you primarily, it's about the Lord."

So you bless your pastor for the Lord's sake, not because of his personality. I'll be quite honest, I don't think I have the greatest personality. I'm pretty pretty vision driven, I'm pretty strategic, I'm pretty goal-oriented, I'm about the task and I'm just not the best glad-hander out there. I've tried to be nicer through the years and I do love you deeply but if you're going to love me, primarily it's going to be because I show you the things of Christ, not because I'm just a fun guy. I appreciate that. And I've tried to be more fun as the years have unfolded but it's not personality.

Now, thank God you get some Apollos's like they had in Corinth where the people go, "Woo, wow, what a guy!" You know, Dr. Adrian Rogers was, he's in heaven now, Dr. Rogers pastored the Bellview Baptist Church, probably the most respected and prominent evangelical pastor of the last 50 years, now Dr. Rogers and I would disagree on some things but he loved me and I'm just praise the Lord for his goodness to me. And he asked me to his office or to come visit him for a whole day not long before he retired. We spent a whole day together. This man could have been President of the world. Just being around him, the charisma, the personality, and he was just one of those guys that loved God but had that too. He would meet these little ladies in the hall, we'd go down the hallway of the church and some ladies would come and he would grab their hands, "How are you today?" He had this deep baritone voice. "How are you?" And those little ladies would just swoon and melt in his presence. And I'm just walking around with this guy thinking, "Man, I don't have what he's got. I just don't have any of that." But that kind of

thing, look, that goes and comes. Look, if you get wrapped up in the charisma or the personality of a man, you're going to miss Christ. You're going to miss Christ.

So you bless him, submit to him and respect him, not out of personality, not out of even performance, but out of the position God has given him. If you don't believe God placed Jeff Noblit here as your preaching pastor, you either need to repent or go somewhere else. You've got to believe that. You've got to believe in the sovereignty of God. He has given us someone to preach the great riches of Christ to us. Now, he didn't have to pick that guy and he may move him next week, but for now that's what God did so it's not the performance, it's not the personality.

They had a personality cult problem in the church at Corinth 2,000 years ago and they made Apollos this wonderful one to follow. And let me tell you something that's so consistent throughout church history, the great men of God that I study are men's lives that are full of weaknesses. Weaknesses: emotionally, physically and in other ways. They're just not real strong in some ways. D. L. Moody, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Vance Havner, we could go down the roll of what we would call giants in ministry, men who often spent months away from their ministries just discouraged and depressed, just weakness. Early in my ministry, I tried to read up on that. Why when I see these biographies, these men went through months, sometimes...Spurgeon wasn't in his pulpit at least half the time the last 15 years of his life because he was just sick and down all the time, and someone explained because the weight of the responsibility just wears down the soul and I guess that's part of the understanding there. That's why I'm so grateful to you for your understanding of the things I need to do to stay replenished.

So God has just a pattern. Elijah ran away depressed and scared of Jezebel and was out of the ministry for a while. Peter failed the Lord three times, showed his vulnerability. You know, even your preaching pastor sins and I may have to repent and get some things right and I hope, God forbid, I don't sin in such a scandalous way I lose my office. I haven't yet. I don't plan to but, you know, God sometimes shows you the man's weakness so you'll be reminded, "I honor him for the position God gave him and that God uses weak men because often it's in our weakness that he is made strong." So we bless them for the Lord's sake. I've got to skip all kinds of stuff.

Let's go to the second thing. Not only do we bless them for the Lord's sake, it's about the Lord, we bless them because we want to be a fellow worker in the Lord's work. A fellow worker in the Lord's work. Paul in Romans 16:3 talked about Priscilla or Prisca and Aquila and he calls them "fellow workers." And then over in 3 John 1:8, he talks about supporting men who are your leaders that you may be a fellow worker. And when all of you are respecting and submitting to your pastors and your leaders here and you're falling in line and you're working, we're trying to tell you to work, I mean, obviously you can't have a church of 900+ active people and everybody just say, "Well, here's what the Lord told me to do." How do you know if God told you to do something in a local church? Here's how you know: the church leaders tell you to do it. It's literally that simple. How does a child know what's the Lord's will for their life? They ask their parents for permission or guidance. Now, certainly we will listen to things and suggestions and we've

actually even developed ministries from people coming and saying, "I feel led to do this." But I would expect that person who comes and says to the church elders, "I feel led to do this," if the elders say, "You know, that won't fit with what we're convinced God's given us to do as a church," they also say, "Praise the Lord. Maybe another time," and they fall right in line and keep serving the Lord. Look, you don't go hop-skipping and jumping around to the church until you find one that fits you. Amen? You don't hop-skipping around until you find one that lets you do what you want to do. You find one that's glory of God focused, Christ honoring and Bible saturated and you find your place of service in that ministry. Why? Because you want to be a fellow worker.

One little quick illustration and I'm just going to fly through this. Tom, don't even worry about putting this up. It's too quick. But in 1 Corinthians 4, Paul told the Corinthians, "Be imitators of me." In 1 Corinthians 11:1, he said, "Be imitators of me." In 1 Thessalonians 1:6 he says, "Become imitators of us." Then Ephesians 5:1, he says, "Be imitators of God." Now you think, "Okay, Paul, imitate you, follow you, follow your example, imitate you. Then all of a sudden you switch and say, 'No, be imitators of God.' Now Paul, which one is it? Paul, are we following you or following God?" It's always both. You follow your pastors and in doing that, unless they're clearly unbiblical, then you are following God. It's easy, folks. God doesn't want to confuse you or put you in trials and tribulations about, "Oh, what am I supposed to do?" No, if you've got a thoroughly biblical church, find a place in there under the oversight of your elders where you can serve and you can know you're following God by following their example and leadership. In 2 Thessalonians 3, twice Paul says to follow his example. In 1 Peter 2, he says, "but follow Christ." "Okay, Paul, now wait a minute, are we following you or following Jesus?" It's always honoring and following your leader is honoring and following Christ. And people want to make this so mystical, so, you know, "I'm driving down the road and a saw this sign and the moon appeared a certain way and the sun was rising and God said." Well, how about going off if God said that or not? You're going to call your church leaders if it concerns church work and say, "Can I have your blessing to do this?" and you'll find out. Look, either God's big enough to work through authority over you or he isn't.

Remember the guy that came to Jesus in the Gospels? He came to Jesus and he implored the Lord, "Please heal my sick son at home." Then he says, "But you don't have to go to my house because I am a man in authority, I'm under some authority but I have people under my authority, I tell this one to do that and they do it, I tell this one to do that and they do it so, Lord, you can just say it and he'll be healed." And Jesus said, "I've not seen such great faith in all of Israel." What was Jesus pointing out there? Among other things, he was pointing out, "If you understand how God works through authority, then you have great faith." Wives who understand, "God works through my husband," has great faith. Children who understand, "God works through my parents," they have great faith. Citizens who understand though they should not do anything that is sinful, but understand, "God works through the authority of the governing officials, I'm to respect them," they have great wisdom. Employees who work for their employers, like the Bible says, like working unto the Lord, that takes great faith. And church members who say, "I'm going to honor the elders God has given us, even the imperfections and sometimes the weaknesses they or he may have," that takes great faith. It just does.

Hurrying on. Not only do you respect them and submit to them and bless them for the Lord's sake and also because you want to be a fellow worker, and this one is so primary, C: because of their responsibility. Their responsibility. Hebrews 13:17, he tells you to obey and submit to your leaders, now notice what he says, why? Because it's "they who keep watch over your souls." Now, we have an arrogant proud spirit in Christendom, especially in the West because Western people don't understand authority like Eastern people do, and it's like, "I can have a Bible study. I can teach the word. I can do my own thing. I, I, I." But here's the difference: there is only one office where God has given a man the responsibility to watch your eternal soul. Are you listening to me? Nothing wrong with a lot of good Christian organizations but the man over you in Gideon's is not ordained of God to watch over your soul. Y'all may can do some good work together, but he's not ordained to watch over your soul. Promise Keepers came around years ago for men, some good in that. I blessed my men who wanted to be involved but the leaders who are over you in Promise Keepers are not ordained of God to watch over your soul. Campus Crusade for Christ, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, fine organizations but the people who are in authority there are not ordained of God, they do not have that responsibility before God. It makes a huge difference. 1 Corinthians 4 says these stewards will have to give an account and 1 Peter 5 teaches that pastors will be evaluated concerning their ministries at the judgment seat of Christ.

D. Not only their responsibility but connected closely to that, for your own well-being. For your own well-being. Again, Hebrews 13:17, he says to submit to them and obey them, for they keep watch over your souls, and here it is, "as those who will give an account." Not only to only the God ordained office of pastor watches over your soul and has a responsibility, he's the only one and that's the only office that will give an accountability for you before God. I took that very lightly the first 15-20 years of my ministry and in the last 15-20 years, it is a burden that whether or not you truly know Christ and love him is a huge weight on a God called pastor. None of you will give an account for the other people around you the way the preaching pastor of this church will give an account before God for you. So Paul says, "Please obey them and submit to them because they have an accounting you know not of." It's for your own well-being. I believe the problem is sin, the solution is the Gospel and the front line is the local church so you need to decide in your own heart, "I first and foremost want to learn and serve under a pastor who is appointed by God and will give an account to God for my soul."

Now, let me close with this thought in 1 Corinthians 16, back to our text and in verse 18 Paul says something interesting about these leaders in the church plant in Corinth. So they were in effect extensions of him; they were like associate ministers to Paul. He says, "For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men." They have refreshed my spirit. I meditated on that for a while. "Refreshed" just means "to bring rest; to bring intermission from labor." The way Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus had taken over and kept the church at Corinth functioning in an orderly way, Paul said, "It just has brought refreshing to my soul."

It reminded me of David, King David is in a cave, he's hiding out because the Philistines have taken over the city and David is mounting a counter-attack to reclaim God's city from the Philistines, but at this time he's in a cave and you don't turn there, but just listen to the text, it's in 2 Samuel and as David is just yearning to be back in God's place and in God's city and the vile Gentile Philistines be removed from that land, the Bible says in 2 Samuel 23:14, "David was then in the stronghold, while the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem. David had a craving and said, 'Oh that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate!' So the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, and drew water from the well of Bethlehem which was by the gate, and took it and brought it to David." It's amazing, they risked their lives, sneaked through, fought through the line of the Philistines to get a cup of cold water because David their leader said, "I want a drink of water from the well that is by the gate in Bethlehem." David wouldn't drink it though, he actually poured it out as an offering unto the Lord and I thought, you know, every pastor is like David. David's job was to make conquest of the land and build the kingdom of God and that's what a church is doing and that's what a pastor is doing.

And David has these mighty men. Now, he had a lot of great men and a lot of valiant soldiers but the mighty men were different, they were stronger, they were more agile in combat, they were not just ordinary soldiers. Their physical strength was combined with inner strength and courage and it just made them stand out and I thought through the years how I am thankful for the mighty men of Grace Life Church of the Shoals, men who have stood the test, men who have braved the difficulties, men who have taken the slander, men who in this congregation are a garrison of mighty men loyal to their pastor out of loyalty to God and due to the valiant work of these mighty men of this congregation, the conquest of enemy territory is well under way and the kingdom is being secured for Christ's sake. These are men who are committed to evangelizing. They are committed to equipping the saints. They are committed to encouraging from the Scriptures. These are men who will not tolerate divisive and factious men in the church. These are men who discern the shallow and the carnal and will give them no advance in God's church. And men, you are indeed the mighty men of Grace Life Church of the Shoals and you're bringing God great glory and like Stephanas and Achaicus and Fortunatus to Paul, you have brought refreshing to my soul and I thank God for you.

Do you know what's interesting? I could call the names of a lot of them but I have mighty men here I don't even know about. You're standing, you're defending, you're loving, you're protecting. It's been amazing through the years as I have seen God raise up, especially so many younger men, who are strong and stalwart in the faith and I thank God for you.

So while I have commended you a lot and you are worthy, maybe you need to repent some places too and reaffirm some things in your heart this morning so that Grace Life Church 5, 10, 40 years from now can still be and even moreso, a glory of God focused, Christ honoring, Bible saturated church that brings God much glory.

Let's stand together in prayer, alright?