

Clarity in Stepping Back

1 Timothy 3:14-16

Introduction: Stepping back from normal routines has the unexpected advantage of re-evaluation, a clarifying of what is most important. There is a scene in a old movie called "You've got Mail" (a remake of a really old movie called "Shop Around the Corner") made in 1998 with America's dad, Tom Hanks. There is a scene where a group of 4 people are stuck in an elevator for long enough that each had time in the midst of a hectic, NY life to contemplate their life: "I'm going to call my mamma", "I'm going to marry Irene" were some of the decisions solidified. Tom Hanks love interest comment was simply: **"where are my tic-tacs....arrrrgggghh!** No contemplation. No evaluation. Only further self focus. After getting off the elevator, Tom Hanks' character broke off his relationship with the high maintenance, self-driven, frankly annoying woman in his life. After leaving the elevator, he said, **"Suddenly everything had become clear."**

In this time of **step back**, we have been able to ask questions and evaluate, from our own lives, values, businesses, families, and our church. When it comes to our life in Christ and our church, we have considered:

- **What has changed:** Obviously, we are not able to meet at a location and in our building, we no longer have Sunday or weekly programs (outside of SG's), we are not observing the ordinances of **baptism and communion**, primarily since they are relegated to the **gathering of the church** (see 1 Cor. 11:17-34)
- **What has not changed:** We still are committed to the Word of God and preaching (as you and I are both listening to right now, which is weird), Biblical principles played out, the people who make up the church, the gospel, our mission, Christ, worship, prayer, evangelism, and our desire to care for and love each other. These have changed **ONLY** in venue and expression, not in foundation.
- **What will change:** Perhaps this is the most important question. Some are claiming that the church will be radically different moving forward, but what they mean is a change in form and function, moving more and more toward online expressions. We will definitely continue to use **means** provided to be more effective in our mission, including technological advancements. But the change we are really after is this: *what will change with us as a church in the coming weeks/months as we are able to step back and evaluate?*

As we get back into **1 Timothy**, its important to remember why Paul wrote this letter to the church at Ephesus in the first place, He was separate from them after spending **3 years** (Acts 20:31) with them, and he wanted to **clarify** what they were supposed to be doing. Now, this was **NOT** new information. It was **re-cast** information, making sure that this group of people was still on target, so the vision for the church was recast. This was a regular tactic and strategy for Paul, as it is for us, since we **ALL** need reminders of the most important things in our life with Christ.

Paul's main point: ***How and why you live in God's church matters, both for your own life and your mission. "How one ought to behave" was a RESULT of new life in Christ, and affected the treatment of family within the church and reaching those outside.***

So we will refresh ourselves in these truths we know, have talked about, and even preached on, but these come at a moment where we have opportunity to self-evaluate:

THE CHURCH IS GOD'S FAMILY

*I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the **household of God**.*

Sometimes the best way to describe something is by *metaphor*, and that's what God does in the NT with the church. He compares the church with a **body** (Rom. 12:4-5, 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:12; Eph. 4:12, 5:23, 5:30; Col. 1:24) a **bride** (Rev. 21:9; 19:7-8; 2 Cor. 11:12; Eph. 5:31-32) and a **building/Temple** (1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:5-7). Each carry a different nuance but explain the SAME foundational realities. Here Paul uses **household**, comparing it to a family which we've looked at in the qualifications of leaders (1 Tim. 3:4, 5, 12) and will see when it comes to caring for widows (1 Tim. 5:4, 8, 14). What is true of the church as a **household**? It means we can learn much about our homes through the church and the church through the way our homes operate. In other words, the building up of both our households and the church are intimately intertwined.

- **An entry and means of belonging** – In a family, you enter in through **birth, adoption, or new covenant reality called marriage**, and thus belong no matter your personality or attribution. In God's church, the means of entry is **re-birth through the gospel, a New Covenant** reality of forgiveness through Jesus Christ, adopted as sons and daughters (Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). Belonging in a church is NOT based on who you know, where you serve, or what gifting you possess. Salvation in the gospel makes you part of His family
- **Leadership** – God has ordained a leadership structure in home, from husband and wife to parents and children (to children and pets?) There is equality of personhood but differences in responsibility in the home, and that is extended to God's church. This is where elders have the functional role of authority and responsibility to care, protect, nurture, and teach.
- **Responsibility & Morality** - Paul had expectations of the church in his absence: Prayer for the lost, train for godliness, take care of widows, flee sin, pursue righteousness, etc. Being a part of a church means *proactive, intentional service and activity, particularly when it comes to Spirit fueled obedience*. In the home, there are similar expectations for anyone that's part of the family: chores within the home, schoolwork (work), contribution, and even reputation outside
- **Mission** – In the home, there is a mission: for parents, to care for and rear children, and for children to grow, mature, and prepare for life in the future. Families use their home for hospitality, discipleship, and outreach. The church has a mission, and it comes right from the heart of God and Jesus' mission: *"that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost."* (1 Tim. 1:15) I was walking through our lobby yesterday looking at all the cards hung up, representing 100's of people we are praying for, planning and risking to share the gospel. We have hope that Christ commissioned us and promised His authority and presence (Matt. 28:19-20), so we have motivation to continue to pray and share.
- **Release** – The goal of parents: to release children from under their roof, to train them up in the way they should. The church looks to send worker to the harvest (Luke 10:2) and to go and

make disciples. Where disciples are made, new churches are planted (or re-planted) and the church not only perpetuates but becomes effective in her mission.

- **Relationship** – Everything done in the home is relational. Empty nesting mothers will say their favorite time in life is when the kids all come home and are together (moms right now who are schooling and at home every day with their kids may feel a little differently). The relationships in a family are unique from other friendships since they were not because of choice but by birth, and the commitment comes from the reality of family. Family loves deeply, can bicker often, can feel like the best of friends and worst of enemies (in the same hour), but one cannot get out of the commitment easily. In the church, relationships rule, and relationships not based on the normal criteria of common interests or similar stages of life, but on a common commitment to Christ and the Spirit filled bond of unity bought through the gospel. It is where there is **care for people**, particularly widows in 1 Timothy. **Discipleship** is a relational act where life is modeled, learning takes place, and maturity is developed. Learning does not only take place in a classroom, but also in everyday life. One of the joys of being a dad is discipline and training my girls, every day, to prepare and teach them to love and follow the Lord. Sometimes its formal, often informal, but always **intentional**. In fact, **it's the intentionality of relationships that sets the church apart**. Relationships are where growth happens but also a visible and tangible manifestation of being IN CHRIST.

Think about how the NT describes relationships in the church as playing out the "**One Another's**". These are not based on gifts, leadership responsibility, personality, or talent, but a commitment to God's household. This is NOT an exhaustive list, but one that captures the focus of the one anothers. ***How would practicing these in your home transform your relationship with your spouse, kids, or parents? How would it transform your life in the church?***

Bear OA's burdens (Gal. 6:2) Bear with OA in love (Eph. 4:2) Be kind and forgive (Eph 4:32)

Addressing OA in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19) Submit to OA (Eph. 5:21)

Bear with and forgive OA (Col. 3:13) Teach and admonish OA in all wisdom (Col. 3:16)

Abound in love for OA (1 Thess 3:12) Encourage OA that Christ is returning (1 Thess 4:18)

Encourage and building OA up (1 Thess. 5:18) Seek to do good to OA and to everyone (1 Thess. 5:18)

Comfort OA (2 Cor. 13:11) Love & Outdo OA in showing honor (Rom. 12:10)

Live in harmony with OA (Rom. 12:16) Show hospitality to OA w/o grumbling (1 Pet. 4:9)

Serve OA with our giftedness (1 Pet. 4:10) Clothe ourselves with humility toward OA (1 Pet. 5:5)

Exhort OA every day (Heb. 3:13) Stir up OA to love and good works (Heb. 10:24)

Not neglect to gather with OA, but rather encourage (Heb. 10:25) Confess sin to OA (James 5:16)

Do not grumble against OA (James 5:9) Do not pass judgment on OA (Rom. 14:13)

Do not provoke or envy OA (Gal. 5:26) Do not bite or devour OA, or be consumed by OA (Gal. 5:15)

Do not lie to OA (Col. 3:9) Do not repay evil for evil, but seek to do good to OA (1 Thess. 5:15)

Fellowship with OA in the light (1 John 1:7) Love one another, as those who know God (1 John 4:7)

Ought to love OA since God so loved us (1 John 4:11) Love is perfected if we love OA (1 John 4:12)

Love OA just as Christ loved us (John 13:34) World will know we are disciples when we love OA (John 13:35)

This is my commandment: Love OA (John 15:12, 17) Love OA earnestly from a pure heart (1 Pet. 1:22)

Welcome OA as Christ has welcomed us (Rom. 15:7) Greet OA with a holy kiss (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12)

These must be done in personal, intentional, familial relationships. These cannot be cultivated in an online venue, but require **close proximity, time, risk, vulnerability, care, and trust**. This type of relationship is **difficult**, which is why there is a call to love AND forgive, to bear with, to not repay. I was reminded this week that often this puts us next to **SANDPAPER relationships** that create discomfort but also smoothes out our rough edges.

In other words, commitment to the full expression of relationship in God's church is **transformational**. It changes us, grows us, shows us what needs to change, and creates more dependency on God and the work of the Holy Spirit as a guide in the truth and One who convicts us of sin.

THE CHURCH IS BUILT ON AND UPHOLDS TRUTH

*Which is the **church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth***

What gives us the guide of how to do this? It comes out of the **gift of** and our **commitment to** the Truth. We are finding right now in our history that knowing what is true and what is partially true, false, or fake is growing increasingly difficult. Where do we go for news? We are also realizing that in something like a pandemic brought on by a "new" virus, no one has a handle on the truth. But we have the **transcendent, living, transformational truth** that the church is the foundation and pillar of. The truth is **foundational AND Beautiful**. Paul was picturing the beautiful Temple to Diana in Ephesus, which had ornate columns, immense proportions, and was known around the world, yet served a **dead god!** The church is owned and purchased by the **living God, who is actively growing and adding to it**. We are committed to living our lives in the church the way God describes it, how He demands it, and how He declares it. It's His church, not ours. So we center on the **authoritative, sufficient, inerrant, and infallible Word of God**, to teach it, know it, obey it, share it, meditate on it, sing it, memorize it, and study it, defend it, and proclaim it.

Some have expressed concern that churches may struggle to exist through this time of shutdown, or they will shrink as a result. I believe and pray the opposite. I believe we will see more come, who are called by Christ, because we serve a **living God who calls dead men to live and blind men to see, and a church where even the gates of hell can't stand against it**. Our best days are ahead, so we are not going to operate out of fear but faith, not of retreat but risk, not of limited interaction but love.

THE CHURCH EXISTS BECAUSE OF AND FOR JESUS CHRIST

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:

*He was manifested in the flesh
Vindicated by the Spirit
Seen by angels
Proclaimed among the nations
Believed on in the world
Taken up in glory*

But HOW are we supposed to do this? *How do we accomplish this?* Through the gospel of Jesus Christ! This was most likely an early hymn of the church, sung together to remember these realities. The common confession was about **godliness**, or a desire to be obedient to a holy God. This did not come from trying, or keeping, or doing, but was achieved **in a Person, the Person of Jesus Christ**. He is the mystery that has been revealed to us. In **6 short stanzas**, this hymn declares, sums up, and proclaims the gospel:

1. **Manifested in the flesh** - This is Christmas. The eternal Son who took on flesh, who was revealed to us in the incarnation (John 1:14), God made visible as He willingly condescended from glory to this earth (Phil. 2:6-7). In Him the fullness of deity dwelt (Col. 2:9), but became a man so that He could live in perfect obedience and righteousness and become a substitute for humanity to save us from God's wrath
2. **Vindicated by the Spirit** - This is Easter. "and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness **by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.**" Jesus was vindicated, or justified, not only when He died, but when God raised Him from the dead. A martyr will die for people, but only the Savior would die AND RISE AGAIN.
3. **Seen by Angels** - Jesus was witnessed by the supernatural. Think about the angelic activity in Jesus' life: at the foretelling (Luke 1:26:38); His birth (Luke 2:14), His temptation (Matt. 4:11), His agony in the garden (Luke 22:43), His resurrection (Luke 24:4, 23), and His ascension (Acts 1:10-11). Angels longed to look at what the good news would be (1 Pet. 1:12), and they saw it in Jesus Christ.
4. **Proclaimed among the nations** - The scope of Jesus witness was not just supernatural but natural, so that every tribe, tongue, people and nation would hear the good news. Not only does that shape our **mission**, but we have hope that all of these will be represented in the eternal kingdom forever (Rev. 5:10)
5. **Believed in the world** - What was Jesus' purpose, and why were the gospels written: "*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.*" John 20:30-31
6. **Taken up to glory** - Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection, and He said if He went up this way, He would RETURN again the same way (Acts 1:11). He came the first time to save, He will come the second time to reign and rule.

Six stanzas that changed the world. The birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, who was seen by angels, proclaimed to all the nations, and believed so that we could have life. This is the **power and purpose** of our life and church. He is why we have hope in moving forward, in risking to share the gospel, in entering into relationships in this church.

So we **step back to move forward**. We evaluate now so that we can be more *proactive*, more *intentional*, and properly motivated to engage than ever before, all to God's glory and the magnification of Jesus Christ.

Questions to Answer:

1. Review the similarities between the church and the household. What stands out to you? What are some other areas of similarity that were not covered? If we truly saw these two institutions similarly, what do you think would change in our thinking and actions in each?
2. Read through the list of "one another's". What is necessary to actually live these out? Which of these is hardest for you? What would be different about your home if these were implemented? What would be different about your life in God's church?
3. Relationships are hard. We are all sinners, and when you put two sinners in close proximity, it can easily cause all kinds of difficulty and conflict. But relationships are essential. What are ways that you can become more involved relationally at Grace. Who are people that you could pursue? Would you be willing to pray for that person and that relationship?
4. Christ gives us the power and motivation through His life, death, and resurrection to do all of these things. How does the truth and reality of the gospel change your life every day, especially when it comes to the relationships we are called to?

Ways to Pray:

1. Spend some time adoring God for who He is: He is a living God, who gave us truth and the gift of His Son, unchanging, sovereign, good, holy, just, loving.
2. Spend time thanking God for the blessings we have in Christ, and also for all the good things we have right now.
3. Spend time praying for other churches in our area, that they would continue to walk in wisdom, purity, and clarity in the gospel.
4. Spend time praying for our government, that they would uphold what is right and function wisely (Rom. 13:1-7).
5. Spend time praying for the people at Grace, that we would not walk in fear but confidence, and that we would continue to care for and love one another.
6. Spend time praying for the leadership, staff, and elders of Grace as we seek to be wise, faithful, and effective in this hard season with many opportunities.