

Dover Church Planting Team

2 Timothy 4:1-5

There is a day I've dreaded for the last 15 years. Ever since I opened a little piece of paper (this is how we did gender reveals back in the day) and saw we were having a **girl**, my mind and heart raced 20+ years forward to a wedding day, filled with equal parts anticipation and dread, as my baby girl will (Lord-willing) marry a young, godly (and hopefully rich) man who will take over care for her (and all my girls) Many of you have experienced this double edged sword in your life. We raise children in the hope that they will leave our home with proven character, wisdom to make God honoring decisions, and a desire to glorify the Lord and often that means they end up leaving US! These were goals all along, but when that day actually comes, reality sets in and the tension of joy and sorrow strikes. We have two choices when we face these days with our kids: we embrace it through the lens of God's sovereignty, knowing He cares for our kids more than we do, and thus rejoice in God's plan, or focus on loss and allow our hearts to wallow in sorrow, fighting against joy.

This morning is much like one of those days as a parent. It is with absolute joy that we **commission families in the LeDuc's, Howard's, and Corey Edwards**. Just over four years ago (March 25, 2018) we commissioned our first church plant/revitalization team to Rancho Cucamonga. Two years ago, (January 19, 2020) we released that church from our care, as they were financially sufficient and had their own elders to guide, lead, and care for the church. This makes us excited for what God has in store for 2024! We have **watched, observed, lived, served, wept, laughed, sacrificed, counseled, worshipped, taught, prayed, and proclaimed** with these, our family members, some for 25+ years, others for the last 4, but all with a deep love and affection. They are ready, equipped, mature, and passionate for Christ, the gospel, God's glory, and His church, so we recognize today that they are not much **leaving** as they are being **sent, an extension of us and united in Christ**. This is a historic morning to be soberly celebrated, to be marked, remembered, and honored by striving to make sure this is not the last one.

We will all admit a few things. 1) **This is hard** - We will miss our friends, and their leaving will leave a void in this church and our individual lives. 2) **This is uncomfortable** – This group leaving comes at a cost - it means we are sending away gifted individuals and means we will all have to step into the void that is left 3) **This is risky and right** - God has called us to grow, to reach, to risk for the sake of the gospel. Since God has offered Himself in Christ as all satisfying, we can embrace the risk of moving to new areas, reaching new people, and enduring hardship for the sake of seeing those who are hopeless, broken, and blind to see and know Jesus Christ, to understand the power of the resurrection, and taste the sweet satisfaction of knowing and being known by God.

So, this morning we commission Team Dover, officially sending them to plant a new work, a new church, in the great State of New Hampshire. This is NOT WITHOUT Biblical precedent, as the gospel has always spread through God's people moving and pastors faithfully proclaiming the Excellencies of Christ. So, we will look at the **context, the charge, and the commitment to commission this precious group**.

Context for Commissioning (Acts 13:1-3)

*Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Them after fasting and praying, they **laid their hands** on them and **sent them off**."*

Makeup and Release by the church at Antioch

The church at Antioch was unique. Persecution in Jerusalem after the martyrdom of Stephen had caused believers to scatter, some taking up residence in Antioch, far North of Jerusalem and part of Syria. Up until the point the church had been made up of Jews alone, but that was changing. Peter received a vision from the Lord that the gospel was to go to Gentiles (non-Jews) as well, and though reluctant at first, even the church at large realized that something new was happening and the Holy Spirit was being given to Gentiles just as it had to Jews (Acts 11:15). The church at Antioch experienced some tremendous "**Firsts**" as a result. They not only saw large growth in numbers, but also in **diversity** as Hellenists (or Greek non-Jews) were saved and added to the church. It was in Antioch the disciples were first called "**Christians**" (Acts 11:26). They were the **first church** to respond to the physical needs of the church in Jerusalem who were facing famine, recognizing that they were not alone in the world, but part of Christ's universal church. And they were sent two men to teach them, Barnabas and Saul, who for a year met with and taught them the Scripture.

I would imagine that the bonds of friendship and unity between these teachers and students would have been strong, forged out of persecution and solidified through the Scripture. It was out of this diverse, faithful, growing church that the Holy Spirit did something else that was new: **He called Barnabas and Saul to leave, to be released, and to be sent.** This was not because they were unsuccessful or because they failed. In fact, it was quite the opposite. The church was at a place of health that they could go on without these two, so **in a context of worship, fasting, and prayer**, the Holy Spirit called them to be sent out of the church to help start other churches around the known world. This would have been hard, uncomfortable, and most likely was met with sadness, but the church prayed, laid hands on, and released them. God chose **the best of the church and did not send them alone** (two elders sent from Antioch – think what they could have done with a Corey!) This was the first of three missionary journey's for Saul (Paul), and countless disciples were made, churches formed, and elders recognized as a result. In other words, this singular church planting venture was the start of a movement of churches, where planted churches would plant OTHER churches.

Our Goal as a Sending Church

Sending is a goal of the church. We are all either in the process of **SENDING** or **preparing to BE SENT**. We live out the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37-40) of loving God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves so that we can play out the Great Commission, which is to make disciples of ALL nations, baptizing and teaching all that Christ commanded (Matt. 28:19-20). Our commitment is not only to proclaiming the gospel, but sharing our very lives with each other, since people are highly valuable (1 Thess. 2:8). We **love in truth, giving the gospel and our lives, our teaching and our service, our laughter and tears, our time and prayer.** We are willing to exhaust ourselves in this. That is why we seek to **equip the saints of the church** for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:11-12) and **send workers to the harvest** (Luke 10:2), since the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Once we have tasted of the goodness of Jesus Christ, the life giving forgiveness of God in Christ, and of real, tangible, and embodied love of God's church, we want more and more to taste of it! Team Dover not only believes this, they have lived it out! They believe it so much they are **WILLING** to give up friendships and sunshine for the sake of those who have not come to a saving knowledge of Christ. This is the foundational motivation for us and this team that more and more would come to a saving knowledge of Christ so they can glorify God, and find their ultimate satisfaction in Him.

At the conclusion of this message, our elders and staff will lay hands on this Team, will pray for them, and we, as a church will commission them to lead Grace Church of Dover, shepherding, teaching, and leading that flock. This will begin as an extension of us here, but will result in growth towards

independence as they seek to recognize elders there who will lead that body. Until then, we will continue to support them with financial, prayer, and any other support they need. But, what are we commissioning them to do?

Charge in Commissioning (2 Timothy 4:1-5)

*I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: **preach the Word; be ready** in season and out of season; **reprove, rebuke, and exhort**, with complete patience and teaching.*

*For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the **truth** and wander off into myths.*

*As for you, always **be sober minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.***

Character of the one commissioned

Timothy was left in the church at Ephesus, a once vibrant and thriving church that had come under fire of false teachers (2 Tim. 2:16-19), something Paul had predicted beforehand (Acts 20:29-30). Timothy was the right man for the job. As Paul travelled on his second missionary journey, he stopped in Lystra and met a young man named Timothy, who was **well spoken of by the brothers** there. He had been trained in the Scriptures by his mom and grandma (2 Tim. 1:5), and had a father who was Greek. Paul asked him to join his trip, and Timothy did so, leaving his hometown, family, and future to serve Paul in the furtherance of the gospel. He was willing to be circumcised (yikes) in order to not put a stumbling block in front of the Jewish people they were trying to reach. Paul referred to Timothy as "**my true child**" (1 Tim. 1:2), **my beloved child** (2 Tim. 1:2), and my **beloved and faithful child** (1 Cor. 4:17). In fact, Paul said he had no one in his life like Timothy (Phil 2:19-22), since he had genuine concern for others welfare, had proven worth, and served Paul in the gospel. It was this sincerity of faith that not only bonded these men in a mentor/disciple relationship, but also gave Paul confidence to leave this young man to shepherd a flock that needed help.

We can declare with confidence this morning, that this team is character qualified, proven over time, to be sent as representatives of Christ and Grace Church of Simi Valley. **Pete and Tim** are elder qualified, **Laura and Sue** are mature and have lives that if emulated would lead someone closer to Christ, and **Corey** is on the pathway to elder qualification. We are sending our best. They have each demonstrated ability, humility, servanthood, and desire to teach, lead, and disciple. This will leave a palpable hole in THIS church, one that will need to be filled faithfully by others. These are each like **Timothy, well spoken of, beloved, and faithful**. We send them without reservation, only sadness.

Charge to the one commissioned

This letter was Paul's last, and this charge given to Timothy the last one we have recorded as well. Last words are important. He gave Timothy a **serious, simple, straightforward charge** of what was most important, not secondary or superfluous. This was not just personal, it was given in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, and we do the same thing, adding this gathering to the weight of this charge. There are 9 commands in 5 verses, and we will try to condense this charge to a few main points:

Keep Preaching Primary – *Since the Word is Primary*

"Preach the Word" - This is as simple as it is difficult. The primary function of an elder is to shepherd the flock (1 Peter 5:1-3), and the central pathway to shepherding is through the Word. Preaching is not

really en vogue today because it has never really been en vogue. Paul told Timothy that a day was coming (and now is) that people will be "lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power (2 Tim. 3:2-5). This means Paul knew the type of people Timothy would be dealing with and seeking to love, and he also knew the remedy. It was to preach the Word.

- **Preaching the Word reminds you where authority and sufficiency comes from** - Not only is Scripture authoritative in all areas of life, it is also the only thing that can transform you and the congregation. We are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:1-2), so the job of pastor-teacher is to connect our minds and hearts to understand God through His Word, which in turn literally makes us new. Paul was clear that the way to train and equip the church for every good work was through the faithful preaching of the Word.
- **Preaching the Word keeps all the focus on Christ** – There will always be pressure on and in the church to compromise, to be gimmicky or to try new methods to bring people into the church, saying that people cannot handle the truth and thus need short sermons, political messages, and “relevant” material. Paul said he did not come to proclaim the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom, but he decided to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:1-2). Let this be your goal. Preach Christ! Preach the gospel! Never stop or tire of plumbing the depths of the love of God, the lavishness of His grace, the goodness of Christ in His atoning death.
- **Preaching the Word expositionally guards you from preaching your own ideas** – As a pastor, you are a mouthpiece of God, speaking His Word, not your own. You will need to work hard to understand, explain, and apply God's Word to all those that you lead. This is the type of hard work not many will understand, and will cost many lonely hours of study, even though you are never alone. Preach the Old Testament and New, challenge your people to deepen their understanding of God, never skip hard passages, and lift the gaze of those you shepherd back to Christ, fixing their eyes on the author and finisher of their faith.

Stay Prepared so you can be FEARLESS

Be ready in season and out of season - Most jobs have an offseason, a time of break, of leaving work behind. You don't. You are always on call. You will be asked to teach when it is convenient and when it is inconvenient, and never say "no" to teaching because you are afraid. You must work hard, all the time, to be ready shepherd. Paul gives the **scope** of what this looks like:

Reprove and Rebuke - You are leaders in the church to help refute error, pointing out what falls short of what God's Word says, and to teach in such a way that our hearts come under conviction. This means you must talk about, deal with, and draw out **sin**. We are all so prone to being deceived by sin, and we need God's Word to cut through the lie. This means there will be times you will be criticized by people who think you unloving, harsh, and out of touch, but calling out sin in the most loving thing you can do.

Exhort - This is a positive word, one that brings gentle correction but also encouragement. God's Word encourages us in Christ that we can have hope and by His grace we can know forgiveness, receive motivating power for obedience, and can know true satisfaction in Him. This must stay in tension, as we give the good news with the bad, the hope for sinners after revealing sin.

Complete patience and teaching - Let your success be defined by faithfulness, as Pastoring is the ultimate **long game**. Just as we will raise our children for 18+ years, so we will walk patiently with people through bad decisions, sinful actions, and immaturity. You will demonstrate the love of Christ in patience in the way Christ shepherds us, never giving up but always speaking the truth in love.

No matter how much you love, how well you preach, or how faithful you are, some will not like it (and thus will not like you) - This is a stinky promise, but a reality nonetheless. Many will not like Biblical teaching and preaching because it flies in the face of what *they desire* - "*I'm ok, you're ok, don't judge me!*" There will always, always be those that "give the people what they want" and those places will seem to be successful, bursting at the seams with people. But, giving people what they want is rarely what they truly need. You must enter into this preaching ministry **fearlessly, not willing to compromise or capitulate BECAUSE YOU LOVE PEOPLE TOO MUCH NOT TOO**. Those diagnosed with cancer are not helped by telling them to go to Disneyland for happiness. They need to go to a doctor! We know true happiness is found in Christ alone so we point people to Him.

Fulfill Your Ministry

Sober - Stay sober and serious about this ministry. This does not mean you should take yourself too seriously, however. Keep laughing, at the ironies of life and the deficiencies of your own human condition. **Take ministry seriously, not yourself.**

Endure Suffering - This life is hard. Every believer will face suffering, and you will do so in a unique way. You will not only face trials, hard circumstance (most which you won't see coming), and temptations, but you will be let down by those who are closest to you. You will let people down and there will be hurtful times where people will say they are leaving the church because of you, or that you are the source of their problems. This is part of the gig, so we find our solace in knowing that we join a throng of pastors that went before who endured the same thing, along with our Savior (1 Pet. 2:24)

Work at evangelism - Train, inspire, and equip your church to bring the gospel outside of the family, which means you will need to work hard at developing relationships in your community and in your home where you can love the lost and be an example to your kids and congregation how to love those who are blind to the gospel.

Commitment in Commissioning

It is with these charges that we commission you. But, there is one more aspect of this morning that we need to address before our elders and Team Dover come forward. That is to the rest of us that will be staying here. **How are we to think? What are we supposed to do?**

Pray

All of this came out of a commitment and practice of prayer, as God funneled our desires into a clear plan of action. We pray that God would never have us do anything on our own, in our own strength, by our own ingenuity or acumen, if He is not directing us. **Prayer is the fuel for worship and focus**, and gave clarity to our leadership in terms of training and sending. How do you adopt the same mindset of a church re-start here? How can God use you to serve, care, teach, and make disciples here? Pray that God would warm your heart to love others, that you would be willing to engage with risk, to get out of comfort zones that we love but rarely teach us anything or force us to depend on the Lord. Pray that this is not our last sending or commissioning, but that God will continue to train up leaders here. And

pray for Grace Church of Dover, for these leaders, for all the preparations and for receptive hearts, that this church will shine brightly in the midst of a twisted and perverse generation.

Give

One of the marks of health in this church is the way we give. We give out of FAITH and an ACT of WORSHIP. We give of our selves first and out of resources alike. We give **sacrificially** and **willingly, joyfully** knowing that Christ is more satisfying than anything money could buy. We give toward the **mission of the church**, knowing that ventures like church training, equipping, sending, and planting take resources. We are committed to paying all of Pete's salary for a few years, and that will come out of the budget here in Simi. But, we also know that as others give and the church members give there, that need will undoubtedly go down. So, we want to support Grace Dover as much as we can, as a parent does when a young adult leaves the home, and then we want to prepare for what God has next. Church planting never happens in a vacuum, but out of a unified commitment to training and sending.

Continue & Repeat

Our hope is that this is not our last commissioning service. We want to move forward with equipping, shepherding, caring, training, risking, and sending. The beautiful thing about this philosophy is that we are not dictating what God will do, but we are open to where He leads. This means that some of you will be the next to go, the next to be sent. It will be some of our kids, our grandkids, who will leave to follow Gods plan, seeking to glorify Him by making disciples of all nations. So, this day is joyfully sorrowful, or sorrowfully joyful, as we long for the day that we will be with our Savior. Until then, we seek to shepherd God's church, to make disciples, and proclaim the Excellencies of Christ to all.

It is with pleasure, thankfulness, and joy that I welcome up Team Dover, along with our elders, as we commission them as a church.