

**Day 16**  
**Pastoral Letters: From ICU to You.**  
*"My sheep listen to my voice." -John 10:27*

Who you listen to matters!

The voices of the unholy trinity of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh is in constant competition with the voice of the second person of the Trinity. It's almost like dueling banjos.

When the Good Shepherd proclaims His Word to His flock with the certainty of an exclamation mark, this triumvirate of sinister skepticism whispers into your ear the doubt of a question mark.

To Adam and Eve in the Garden the devil pulled this ancient switcheroo. Exchanging certainty with doubt. Remember the first temptation, the exclamation mark traded for the question mark: "Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil!" was substituted for "Did God really say?"

When a child of God is suffering in this life the unholy trinity of doubt loves to pick up the hot microphone and take the stage and ask, "If God really loves you, why are you suffering?"

The world works overtime to question the goodness of God. It is a voice that never seems to grow hoarse. It never waxes or wanes. Sin seemingly never grows tired.

But the sheep know the voice of the Good Shepherd. You know the voice of your Good Shepherd. Listen to His voice.

At the Transfiguration, the voice of the Father spoke from the cloud and said concerning Jesus, "Listen to Him."

Who you listen to matters!

Discern His voice. How do you discern? You listen to Scripture. Don't just read theological commentaries, devotionals, or listen to podcasts of the next trendy pastor, or opine at the weekly community Bible study. Don't hang around churches where the common refrain in Bible study is: "I think or feel like this is something Jesus would do." Make yourself comfortable in a congregation of believers where the pastor proclaims, "Thus says the Lord."

Immerse yourself in Scripture.

A pre-seminary professor I had at Concordia University in Ann Arbor, Michigan always said, "The only Bible you have is the Bible you know."

Unfortunately, in today's world, for too many, the only Bible they know is the 'Bible' they have heard about on the street.

Listen to His voice. Go to the source. Don't just listen to the voices of this world who talk about His voice. Listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd for yourself. And listen to the voices of undershepherds who are captive to His voice.

Research suggests that the unborn recognize the voice of their mother already in the second trimester. Amazing! The heart rate of the unborn increases when they hear their mom's voice. Demonstrating that they become more alert. They also have the ability to discern between mom's voice and other female voices.

Jesus said, "My sheep know my voice."

Wherever you find someone or something putting a question mark in place of the exclamation mark of God's Law and Gospel, you know the voice is the hireling who comes to rob and steal. Wherever you find the exclamation mark of God's mercy and grace for sinners calling them to repentance, renewal, reconciliation and resurrection - you know you have found the voice of the Good Shepherd who comes to lay down His life for the sheep.

The voice of the world offers nothing good. It only offers counterfeits of God's perfect creation and His promise of a new creation in the cross. Jesus offers something good to someone.

Someone named "you."

Breaking news! The portrayal of Jesus on social media and mass media isn't necessarily the Jesus of the Gospels.

Listen to Him!

Because who you listen to matters!

Remember, the only Bible you have is the Bible you know.

Jesus is an open Book. The world wants to close the Book. That might be a tipoff in who you can trust...

+To God be the glory!

## Day 17

### **Pastoral Letters: From ICU to You**

*The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone.  
I will make a helper suitable for him." - Genesis 2:18*

Who is the most important pastor in your life?

Answer? It might surprise you. Not the pastor who baptized or confirmed you. Not the pastor who married you. Not the pastor who held your hand in the hospital. Not the pastor who grieved with you by the gravestone.

The most important pastor in your life - in a unique way - is actually your spouse. Let me explain...

First, I mean small "p" pastor. Don't worry. I'm not trying to play games with the Office of the Keys. At your church, the one called and ordained is your 'Pastor,' with a capital "P." Publicly entrusted to preach & teach the Word and serve as the caretaker of celebrating the sacraments.

Your spouse is a special gift from God to help you. This is one of the reasons why God gave marriage. Genesis uses specific language - the term "helpmate." This word implies more than helping around the house, helping raise the kids, or helping pay the bills.

The number one way they serve - you serve - as a helpmate? By daily shepherding one another through this life in Christ. By pointing each other to Jesus in all things.

"Helpmate" in Hebrew is what we might think of as a 'compound' word...this is a non- technical way of breaking this down. One of the words is "ezer." It is used in Scripture as a military term. To "fight" or "battle" in order to "save." Often attributed to the work of the Lord. But here in Genesis it is given in marriage.

Spouses are...

To fight for the kids. To battle for one another. To fight and battle for their marriage. To save one another.

Ultimately, to point one another to the Saviour.

The most important preacher in your life is your spouse! Do you preach Christ to your spouse? Do you battle with them against the temptations of this world? Do you fight the fight of faith alongside them?

How many times have you reassured them they have a Saviour? Do you help them by preaching the Law when they need to hear it? Do you preach the Gospel of unconditional grace to them each day?

There are many characteristics we look for when it comes to marriage material. Cute, funny, witty, smart, athletic, musical, conversationalist, able to provide, genuine, kind, romantic...

If you are young, or have younger children, or young at heart and looking to get married, first on this list? Small "p" pastor.

Will this person draw me closer to Christ?

Personal confession time! Our marriage is far from perfect. I don't need to air our dirty laundry to make the point. After all, marriage is a perfect gift from God above lived out by imperfect people here below. Tough times test any and all relationships. Especially when you are in ICU. So, confessing I am an imperfect person, I'm thankful for a wife who preaches Law and Gospel. Someone who helps me by telling me how it is...who tells me when I'm wrong by the Word and reminds me I'm forgiven by that same Word.

July 28 is our anniversary. When is yours? This year let's thank God for spouses who preach! Thanking God for helpmates who preach our help is in the Lord.

+To God be the glory!

## Day 18

### Pastoral Letters: From ICU to You

*"Having been declared righteous, then, by faith, we have peace toward God through our Lord Jesus Christ." -Romans 5:1*

Ever been through rehab?  
Hip? Knee? Back? Heart? Lungs?

Rehab is a process. Sometimes a long, very long, extremely long process.  
Treadmill, bike, weights, resistance bands, exercise ball, pool, ice, heat, ibuprofen...

Saint Nick (Coach Nick Saban for those not from Alabama) is famous for saying, "Trust the process."

Thankfully, being "right" with God, or good with God, is not a process. You are not "made" right with God, as if it is a ten step program.

You are "declared" right with God.

Do you see the difference? Made vs. Declared.

Made puts the emphasis on us. Declared puts the emphasis on Jesus.

When the Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel, the moment we come to faith, we are no longer enemies but a friend of God.

This isn't a work in progress. Jesus doesn't stand next to the treadmill of sanctification with a holiness stopwatch timing us to see if we qualify for the crown of life.

Forgiveness, life and salvation is the work of Jesus - not our work. Faith receives these gifts. Yes, before others we are a work in progress. Learning how to love. Making amends. Processing how to be more Christ like to each other. Our good works are like the stock market. Sometimes bearish and sometimes bullish.

But before God our status is a done deal. Not potentially a Christian, but actually a Christian. Not progressively a Christian, but certainly a Christian.

When Jesus died in your place a judicial decree was DECLARED! You are a forgiven child of God. A Great Exchange took place at the cross. You gave Him your sin. He gave you His holiness. Jesus said, "It is finished."

Jesus took your sin and He is not giving them back. That is the judgment. That is the decree. So it is written, so it is done.

When you look at yourself in spiritual rehab, you rightfully wonder how God could love the mess you have made. But when you look at what Jesus has done for you, how can the Father not love you?

Take comfort in knowing your status before God is not a process. Jesus is not a physical therapist or sports trainer tracking your progress to see if you are cleared to get back into the game of life.

Take comfort in knowing the Father is a Gift Giver. Rejoice that He gifts you with righteousness and holiness. Not by being "Made in American" but "Declared in the Kingdom of God."

+To God alone be the glory.

## Day 19

### Pastoral Letters: From ICU to You

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not in your own understanding." - Proverbs 3:5*

Let's play one quick round of the game "Would You Rather."

Would you rather be independent or dependent? Pretty easy, huh? Independent! Right? Of course!

Once exiting the womb until entering the tomb our lives are spent striving and seeking to be independent. Even the sunset years of our life are a struggle to be as independent as possible. Ever try to take the car keys away from your elderly mother or try to convince your aging father to move into an assistant living facility?

We are conditioned by the kingdom of this world to be independent. But is that the goal in the Kingdom of God? What if God's goal for you in life is different? What if God's goal for you in life is to be dependent on Him?

When the disciples were sent out to preach and teach Jesus told them to take no bag, no money, no food. Why? Jesus wanted them to learn to trust in Him.

When the 5,000 had no food Jesus tested the disciples by telling them to feed the masses. Why? Jesus wanted them to see they needed to look away from themselves and lean on Him to feed the crowd with only 5 loaves and 2 fish.

We can't always answer the "why" questions in life. But we can answer the "who" question. Who do we turn to? Jesus. Only Jesus. Jesus is the answer to the question of "who."

Peter answered the question: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You only have the words of eternal life."

Scripture is a testimony, witness, and account given to us, to encourage us, to be dependent on the Lord.

The Lord can turn curses into blessings by using even difficult circumstances in this life. How? Through every situation we can learn to turn away from leaning on our own understanding and trusting in Him.

Perhaps, this is why the Lord leaves us, at times, with nothing else in this life but Him, so that we see He is all that we need.

This is a reason why Paul said, "Rejoice in the Lord always." Not that his lot in life was necessarily pleasurable or enjoyable - but He trusted that the Lord could use the struggle to grow in grace and dependence! Reasons for rejoicing!

Dependence is scary because you have to trust in the caretaker. And life experience has taught us that no one can truly be trusted. But Jesus is different. Jesus is the only God to climb a cross for you!

There are so many blessings in this life when you learn to be dependent. For example, you will be a more generous person. When your goal is independence you have to hang on tight to all that you have and all that you own, because those possessions are what make you independent. But if your goal is dependence? Well, you can let go of what you have been given by God to serve others because you already trust He will provide. Ironically, generous people are dependent people. Stingy people are independent people.

So, would you rather be independent or dependent? In the Kingdom of God the answer isn't a no-brainer. It takes prayer, study, reflection, and more prayer. The correct answer is dependent. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not in your own understanding."

+To God be the glory!

## Day 20

### Pastoral Letters: From ICU to You

*"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." -Acts 16:31*

How strong is your faith? Let's use a scale of 1-10. How do you rank?

Are you a Doubting Thomas? Are you a little mustard seed? Or will you be inducted into the 'Faith Hall of Fame' in Hebrews 11?

If you are like me, you might find yourself all over the place. Sometimes you're walking on water and sometimes you're drowning in the sea.

When times are tough and rough others might be encouraging you to give up on your faith. Remember Job's wife: "Let's just curse God and die."

But like Job you hang on to the Lord. Remember Job's response: "Although the Lord slays me, I will hope in Him."

You hang on by a thread.

But is the thread strong enough? Is the thread of faith enough to save you?

Here is a statement that will shock you, but when the shock is over it will comfort you!

You are not saved by your faith.

You are saved by the object of your faith.

Jesus saves. Not you.

Saving faith is not like a video game where you progress from one level to the next.

Thankfully, Jesus is always bigger than our faith.

Our Christian life is found in "looking unto Jesus." (Heb. 12:2) Not in looking to our own faith.

The saving power is not in the faith but in the God in whom faith relies.

Often, I use silly little illustrations with Confirmation students. I tell them they can dial 811 and have all the faith in the world the police will come, but we all know no one will show. Why? Misplaced faith.

You can dial 911, even with some fear and trembling, but the police will show.

Why? The object saves! Faith receives.

As we battle throughout our lives, the knowledge of Christ's certain power frees us to take our eyes off ourselves. Confessing our lack of faith, we cling to the sure and certain promise of His finished work on our behalf.

Oddly enough, it is easy to turn faith into a good work and fall right back into the pit of works righteousness.

To those of you who feel like your faith is frail and fleeting no matter how hard you try - take heart! Even a faith as small as a mustard seed moves mountains!

Faith does not save. Faith in Christ saves!

Believe and be saved? No. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!"

To those who have been tested by God and know how strong and weak faith can be, this is a sweet sentence!

+To God be the glory!