

Introduction

First I want to thank you, Brad, for inviting me to give you this charge. It is a great honor. After hearing all of this high praise for you, I figure you must have chosen me because my gift is telling people what they do wrong. Maybe you knew that this service needed to come down to earth a little.

I want to say to you that it has been a privilege to watch you grow as a Pastor these past 20 years.

Brad, I have seen you work with kids from this church, kids from the town, their families, our daughter, and our grandchildren. You are an awesome pastor. After day camp – two young people spoke to me about Pastor Brad. They spoke in glowing terms. One of them told me how you really understand where they are coming from – really understands the issues they face. You have the pastoral gifts.

Over the years, we have talked vision – vision for youth ministry – vision for the church. You have told me at times that you are not a visionary – but I want to tell you that you are enough of visionary to see where God is taking a group / a church / a team and then to articulate it in ways that inspire – that motivate. I have learned from you in this area.

It has also been a privilege these past years to watch you grow in your ability to communicate the gospel and God's word to a generation that is carpet bombed with information. It is harder than ever to proclaim the truth of God's word to this generation. It is obvious that you are working at it. I remember your first sermon after you completed New Testament Greek. A number of us left that sermon saying "It's Greek to me." But that was long ago – and when you preached this fall while I was away, I couldn't wait to download those sermons because I learn from you when you preach.

Brad, you are well equipped for the task you have been performing as pastor. You are well equipped for this next step.

Okay – now that was to good part.

Charges:

I have 4 charges for you

Knowing what the Father is doing – Learning to Listen

The first is taken from John 5:19 – Jesus said "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing;" If we are going to follow Jesus in our pastoring, it is imperative for us to get to know what the Father is doing . A big part of that is saturating yourself with His word. Not just reading it for facts or theological principles – but getting to know the heart of the Father by what He has revealed in the scripture. God will always be where His heart is. Learning His heart is a lifetime task.

But an even bigger part of that is to learn how to listen to the Father. Brad, you and I have had the incredible privilege of being here at the Barn at a time when God began to teach us how to listen to Him – in prayer. We are still beginners – but we have learned a lot and experienced a lot. We have seen it work in high school students as well as adults.

The reason this is so important is because the pastor's job is impossible. There is no end to the needs to be met. Every single person who sits and listens to you on Sunday is one decision away from moral, financial or marital ruin. Every one of them. Many are considering choices that will haunt them the remainder of their lives. On Friday I got a call from a friend who described to me his situation – there is no possible way out of this mess. I could not meet his need. You're top line – the motivated ability that drives you - is to meet needs. But whose needs? And when? And How? Our only hope is to see what the Father is doing and hear where he is calling us to join in. The scriptures are only of some help here. But it is essential for us to have our ears opened up by the Father to listen.

This means that the Father is not going to touch every need you come across / heal every heart / restore everyone's health through you. The only way as pastors we can know where to go – with whom to spend time – where to expend our resources is watching to see what the Father is doing and hearing when and if He is inviting us to join him.

You have come a long way on this journey – let Him continue to wake you morning by morning and give you the ear of a disciple. Isaiah 50:4 tells us that Jesus learned how to sustain the weary by listening to His Father. It's hard work – it takes discipline – we are always going to be beginners at knowing God's heart – at listening to Him – but press on. Make it your goal in everything you do – to only do what you see the Father doing – to only go the places the Father invites you.

The Power of the Holy Spirit

For my second charge I want to go back in time –just after the wooly mammoths left Connecticut. I was working with about 30 high school students here at the Barn, I invited any who wanted to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit to stay after the meeting to be prayed for. Three kids came forward. Two of them went on to be ordained ministers. Today the third one becomes ordained. I don't fully understand all the ins and outs of the baptism of the Holy Spirit – I know it is not a magic hoop to be jumped through – but I know that the scripture teaches us that it is how we are empowered.

I also know it's not a one time thing. Paul says to be filled and keep being filled with the Spirit.ⁱ Bill Hybels says "Vision Leaks." Well I say "We leak." We need to keep immersed in the power of God's spirit. And you do that by asking.

I know that you want to empower those you work with to do the work of the kingdom – and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is God's method of doing that. So my second charge to you is to incorporate the full immersion into God's Holy Spirit in all that you do. Paul tells the Corinthiansⁱⁱ that he spoke not with mere words but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power. Make that a goal of every word that you speak.

Humility before the data

For my third charge, I want to speak about a kind of humility. I call it having “humility before the data” or “being humble before the data.” Basically this means, in all areas of your life and your ministry – to recognize how little you know about everything and learn to act with humility in the face of that.

In ministering to a high school kid - trying to understand the dynamics of what makes him tick – there is a ton of data you don’t know. In working with a dysfunctional family – there are years of history that you don’t know. In loving the love of your life - your wife, Kristen – the one you have spent the most time with - if you haven’t noticed – there is a lot you don’t know about her.

We live in an age that demands certainty from its leaders. And most powerful leaders speak with a powerful certainty – and people follow certainty – and there is a tendency among leaders to use certainty to lead God’s people. I am not saying that we take the post modern view that there is nothing certain – nothing that can be known for certain. But choose carefully where you are certain.

Let me try to illustrate this – A young woman who was part of your youth group several years ago comes seeking counsel about moving in with her boy friend. Brad, you and I can speak with certainty to that young woman. But if that same young woman comes seeking the counsel about marrying her boyfriend – that’s where the fun begins. There is so much that we don’t know – about one another – about the future – and even about God. We must never underestimate our power to be wrong. We must not pretend to know too much. This doesn’t mean we cannot offer counsel – there is a difference between wisdom and certainty. Learn what it means to be humble with what we don’t know.

Become the Unbusy Pastor

The last charge comes from Eugene Peterson’s book *The Contemplative Pastor*. I want to share one key insight as my fourth and final charge to you Brad.

Become what Peterson calls “the Unbusy Pastor.” The needs are so great around us we can easily fill our schedules with “need meeting.” And to complicate matters, God made you in such a way that you will naturally move to meet needs. Peterson says that the word busy should never be used as an adjective for pastor. You are ministering in a culture where people equate busyness with importance. It ought not be so with you brother Brad.

Here is a simple axiom that I have attempted to follow to help me with this.

Only take on what you can adequately cover in prayer.

If every relationship - every team you are part of – every program you are launching is not covered with time spent before the Father – finding out what He is doing and where He is calling you to join him – you are too busy. If you are going to add something to your schedule – do you have the time to add the prayer that will cover that event?

Brad, Peterson is speaking to you and me. Learn what it means to be “The Unbusy Pastor.”

Conclusion

Brad – four charges as you take this next step –

- Find out what the Father is doing and see if He is inviting you to join Him.
- Repeated incorporate into your life times of being immersed/baptized/filled with the Holy Spirit
- Learn to practice being “humble before the data.”
- Learn what it means to be the “Unbusy Pastor.”

ⁱ Ephesians 5:18

ⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 2:4 My message and my preaching were not **with** wise and persuasive words, but **with** a demonstration of the Spirit's **power**