



Dear Friends,

Two years ago, I was in a period of transition. I was finishing up as Pastoral Vice Principal at Sydney Missionary and Bible College and preparing to return to pastoral ministry at RPC.

It had been eight years since I was a church pastor. There are similarities between ministry at SMBC and the local church. There are differences, too. As a church pastor, I preach to people I do life with rather than teach College students. At College, I trained men and women to be pastors, missionaries, chaplains, and gospel workers. The local church is much more diverse. RPC spans people of all ages, at different life stages, and of varying spiritual maturity. College is located in the inner west, though its ministry is not focused on the local community. RPC is located in Sydney's east precisely because we are called to bear witness to Christ in this specific area.

How was I to prepare for my return to pastoral ministry? I prayed. Ministry can only ever be done in God's strength. I also needed input. For eight years, I had trained men and women to be pastors. I offered them the fruit of my experience, reading and reflections. Now, I needed more than what I had offered my students. I required the wisdom of others.

So, I turned to Scripture. I immersed myself in the Pastoral Epistles, Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus. Words from an older, experienced pastor to younger ministers at the coalface. Timothy at Ephesus. Titus at Crete. Both tough churches.

Why am I telling you all this? This week, I finished reading the Psalms. I had to choose a Bible book to read next in my alone time with God each day.

We've been at RPC for almost two years. So, I thought now is a good time to return to the Pastoral Epistles. When I read them in late 2021, it was to prepare for life and ministry at Randwick. Now we've been here for a while, how do my life and ministry stack up against God's word?

I opened to 1 Timothy, chapter 1. Paul immediately sets out the task for Timothy.

"...stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to meaningless myths and endless genealogies." (1 Timothy 1:3-4)

Paul's goal for Timothy is to preach "the gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me" (verse 11). Paul then takes a brief autobiographical detour.

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 1:13-14)

Paul goes on to say:

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. (1 Timothy 1:15-16)

That's exactly what I needed to hear. Christian ministry is grounded in God's immeasurable mercy and boundless grace. I am qualified to be your pastor because I am a sinner saved by grace. So, I am to embody the message I preach so that people will believe in Jesus and receive eternal life from him. What a relief! And what great cause for praise:

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:17)

God Bless,
Mark Adams