

God's calling, qualification, and care for ministry
Ordination of Scott MacDonald – February 19, 2017

Introduction and challenge for God's church

It's a great honor to see the church recognizing and setting apart my oldest son, Scott, for full-time ministry. When considering what to say to him (and you) at this ordination, what things he needs to remember, the good news was that God already said it all in His word. The hard part was picking the most important passages to highlight. I've chosen to focus on things God has particularly taught me, and is still teaching me, during my years of ministry.

While I will be specifically addressing Scott in this message, I want to begin by reminding you, the church, that we have a responsibility here too. As I reference many passages where God has set His standard for service, for ministry, let each serve as a reminder that this is what a minister of the gospel is to look like. These are the standards by which God's servant-leaders are recognized and set-apart for service. The most passionate and eloquent speaker in the world who does not possess these qualification should never serve in leadership of God's church.

Of the preachers, teachers, and leaders that God has qualified for His church to set apart as elders; remember the responsibility they have been given. God calls us to submit to this leadership, and to provide for their needs (1 Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Corinthians 9:11) and to do so in a fashion where their work is a joy and not a burden (Hebrews 13:17). Pray for them (1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1) as they pray for you (1 Timothy 2:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:2).

Treasure God's Word

In speaking to Scott, my son; the best opening words from Scriptures is the charge-to-service given by the apostle Paul as he wrote to his son in the faith:

2 Timothy 3:14-17 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are

able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Scott, treasure God's Word. Some might think; of course, every minister of the gospel does this! And yet, I stress it again: treasure God's Word. Study it. Believe it. Hide it in your heart, so that you will not sin against God (Psalms 119:11). Be fascinated and enthralled by God's word, this living and active message (Hebrews 4:12). It teaches anew every time you meditate on these Holy words from the God of all Creation, your savior and Lord (Joshua 1:8).

Preach God's Word

Preach the word. Don't yield to worldly pressures sweeping through today's church to minimize reading the word or preaching the word. All the programs and story-filled messages in the world cannot replace God's Word and its Holy Spirit enabled power to change hearts and minds. The apostle Paul included this in his charge to Timothy:

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: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ 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, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Know that people will oppose the preaching and teaching of God's word. While you expect this from openly godless people outside of the church, know clearly that many wolves are among the flock (Acts 20:29). Some of the greatest opposition to God's word that you will face will come from professed believers and declared Christian ministers. Stand firm on God's word no matter what opposition comes.

Teach God's Word

Again, from the apostle Paul:

1 Timothy 4:11-16 Command and teach these things. ¹² Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Be careful and well-studied in what you teach, remembering James' warning.

James 3:1 ^cNot many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

Look to God to increase your wisdom, so that you know what must be taught and what battles must be fought (Matthew 7:6). God has promised to grant the wisdom you need:

James 1:5-6 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

Remember that the goal of teaching God's word isn't to focus on controversies (Titus 3:9) but to clearly proclaim Jesus Christ. As an elderly minister of the gospel warned me as I began in full time ministry: "If you fail to proclaim Jesus while you're teaching, you're wasted your time." In Romans, the Apostle Paul stresses how God uses the preaching and teaching of His word:

Romans 10:14-17 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?³ And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are

the feet of those who preach the good news!" ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Again, I'll emphasize that preaching and teaching God's word surpasses traditions, fads, and the latest philosophical trends. No program or method takes the place of God working through His word, empowered by His Spirit.

Colossians 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

Church, examine your priorities for what you consider important and for the requirements you place on those who serve you in leadership. If the preaching and teaching of God's word is of utmost importance, remember that studying God's word and preparing to speak will be a time priority. If your demands push this into an afterthought, you do a disservice to both the one who teaches and to those needing to hear God's word.

Imitate Christ

Scott, in your preaching and teaching and life, be an imitator of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1). In words Jesus claimed from Isaiah (in Luke 4:18-19), we're reminded of what the Spirit of the Lord calls His people to do, in imitation of Christ.

Isaiah 61:1-2 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.

Remember the poor, the stranger, the widow and the fatherless (James 1:27; Isaiah 1:17) – the least of these (Matthew 25:31-40). Help provide for God's saints and endeavor to be hospitable (Romans 12:3). Rescue those being led to their death (Proverbs 24:11), those who are captives of the devil (2 Timothy 2:26).

Preach the good news of the gospel and of God's pending judgement on all who reject Him. Know that this message is not popular and will bring opposition. Know that your life and your ministry will stink to those who are perishing and they will do everything in their power to rid themselves of you (2 Timothy 3:12).

2 Corinthians 2:14-17 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶ to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

Take note of those last words: "like so many" never become a "peddler of God's word." Don't serve for money and never compromise for money, or popularity, or acceptance. Remember that God will supply all your needs (Philippians 4:19; Matthew 6:25-32)...

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Serve according to the faith and gifting God has given you:

Romans 12:6-8 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

This Romans passage doesn't end here. Keep the words which continue in Romans 12:9 continually in your thoughts:

Romans 12:9-12 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

Take Captive Every Thought

While speaking of thoughts, remember your mind is a battlefield. Give the enemy no foothold here. You need to continually deal with every doubt and every tempting thought. Don't dwell on how to gratify the desires of the flesh (Romans 13:14). Fight this daily battle in the power of the Lord...

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

I'll say it again. Trying and tempting thoughts will come; having them is not sin. What you do with them can become sin. Give them no quarter, no resting place. Immediately take them captive and make them obedient to Christ. The Spirit at work in you will give you the power to do so.

First Ministry Priority

Scott, never forget that God has given you a suitable helper (Genesis 3:20-25), your wife Michal. In God making you one, she serves with you. Through the pressures and challenges of the ministry God has set you apart for, never forget your first ministry is to love your wife as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25) and to instruct your own children in the Lord (Ephesians 6:4; Proverbs 22:6). Let your marriage and your family life example Christ's love of the church and our Heavenly Father's care for His children.

Church, remember this priority for all who serve you in leadership. Don't unduly burden them, in demands of time and presence, so they might be tempted to compromise in this area of spouse and family. It will negatively impact their witness and yours.

Shepherd the Flock

Scott, don't forget you are to be an example. While your example is on display to all (Matthew 5:14), as an elder in God's church He specifically appoints you as an

example for His people. Let the example of your doctrine, your love and care of your family, and your overall Godly way of life and ministry, flow into your willing care for God's people.

1 Peter 5:1-4 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Remember Peter's warning to not lord it over those entrusted to you. The education, career, and titles God has blessed you with don't make you better than God's fellow servants of perceived lowly standing and circumstances. Remember that God, by His Spirit, is at work in every one of His children and that God repeatedly uses people in their weaknesses. Be willing to listen. Over the years I've learned as much from a godly farmer and an auto-mechanic, as I have a pastor or a professor. Know that God will also use you in your weaknesses so that the only boast you have is in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

Encouraging aspiring Elders (Mentoring)

In shepherding the flock, your duty to God's church includes encouraging and training those whom God has motivated to aspire to the office of overseer. It's a sacred duty and joy of every elder to not only safeguard God's flock but to prepare the generation which follows to do the same. You are privileged to pass on, and recognize in others, the God-given qualities that will characterize your life and ministry, traits which must perpetually accompany leadership in Christ's church.

1 Timothy 3:1-7 This is a trustworthy saying: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he

care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Church, never be willing to compromise on God's specified qualifications for ministry service. Remember, it's God who qualifies and prepares for service. Rather than waiting and trusting that God has the right individual, in His timing, far too many have been granted leadership roles while not meeting these essential qualifications. The inevitable problems which follow could have been prevented by submitting to God's clearly expressed will.

Conclusion – God will do it

Scott, in conclusion, I leave you with one final New Testament passage that's been of great encouragement to me. When you feel overwhelmed by the task at hand, the struggles of daily life, and the temptations of the world, let these words drive you to seek the only One who can get you through and keep you standing (Ephesians 6:13; Proverbs 24:16). Know that the One who called you is faithful and He will do it (1 Thessalonians 5:24). As Jude so aptly says:

Jude 24-25 To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— ²⁵ to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Blessing

I would like to pronounce a blessing on not only Scott but also Michal. As these two are one, any blessing belongs to both of them (Matthew 19:6). Take note that in any blessing I offer, I rest in the power, grace, and goodness of God to complete it. Everything good comes from God (James 1:17). Join me in expressing your agreement to this blessing, as a prayer before God, by verbally voicing your Amen at its conclusion.

Scott and Michal: Be careful to keep God's commandments and serve Him out of love (John 14:15, 23) and God will bless you wherever you may go (Luke 11:28). He will bless your possessions and supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). He will bless your work, and His words that you speak will succeed and accomplish all God purposes (Isaiah 55:11). Further, God will bless your family; he will bless you so that you may be a blessing to others (cf. Deuteronomy 28:1-14).

May grace and peace be multiplied to you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus of our Lord (2 Peter 1:2). May you constantly be reminded that your Heavenly Father has blessed you in Christ with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). May the God of peace sanctify each of you completely, and may your spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23). As children of God and priests under our great high priest, Jesus Christ, may the Lord bless you and keep you, and make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; may the Lord turn His face toward you and give you the peace of God which surpasses all understanding to guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Numbers 6:24-26; Philippians 4:7).

Let all God's people say together "Amen!"