



FIVE YEARS A PASTOR, FIVE THINGS I KNOW FOR SURE

Dear Elim Grace,

Five years ago, on September 15th, Pastor Bill passed to me the baton of Senior Pastor. It was, in fact, a shepherd's staff. It stands beside my desk, where I keep it as a daily reminder of my task.

I remember the night of my installation, and I remember the singular prayer in my heart the months leading up to it: "God, in that moment impart to me a fresh power and wisdom to lead and to pastor your people well." I believe God has answered that prayer, though to what degree I don't and I can't know. Real things—eternal things—are happening to us even when—especially when?—we don't feel anything at all.

These five years have moved by quickly. Still, a lot has happened. We've been through a lot. Our world and our country have been through a lot. Yet, here we stand, and I'm filled with thanksgiving to God for you and for what He's done, and with a great readiness for what He wants to do.

In reflecting on these last five years, there are a couple things that have crystallized for me, five things I know for sure, and I wanted to share them briefly with you:

1. **I pray for a big people, not a big church.** There were days where I imagined pastoring a large church, and by large I mean both in number and influence. Those days are gone. The growth in number is in God's hands. What I long for now is for a big people, a people BIG in their knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ. A people BIG in their understanding and comprehension of the Scriptures. A people BIG in their desire and willingness to sing and to worship. A people BIG in their pursuit and obedience to the Holy Spirit. A people BIG in their love and generosity toward their neighbor and city.
2. **I'm called to preach the gospel**—God's salvation of sinners through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. What I know for certain: I am not the Christ; the Christ is the Christ. Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed Son of God. Therefore, I am not everything. I don't know everything. I can't

be everything. I can't do everything. I can't say everything. But ONE THING I ask of the Lord, and that will I seek after; to behold the beauty of Jesus Christ and to preach HIM with all my heart to all that come to Elim Grace. His gospel is the power of God for salvation and transformation.

3. **I want to be a Theologian first of all.** By Theologian, I mean, a student of God. Yes, I want to be a good leader, but I want the scales of my reading and studying to tip more to the side of theology than leadership. This is a personal conviction of mine, not one I hold for all pastors. For me, this is what I have to do to lead and to pastor a BIG people. A good leader can draw people together, guide them to a desired and better future. But the preeminent calling of a pastor, at least for me, is to teach and preach the Word of God. Therefore, to study and to know the person of God is my number one "job requirement".
4. **I want to hand over the shepherd's staff well.** Five years in and I'm already praying, watching, and waiting for the next pastor God will send to us. Again, Elim Grace is not my church. The shepherd's staff is borrowed, entrusted for a season in time. It doesn't belong to me. It belongs to Jesus. I'm but one of many He has called and will call. And since He has loved me and called me from eternity to do this, I want to be found faithful to Him, to you, and to the next pastor. I want to one day know and rest in knowing that I pastored as a good and faithful steward. Not perfect, not the best, but a servant willing to please his Master.
5. **I'm content with being unknown beyond Elim Grace.** There was a day when I wasn't. That day is long buried. I long to be known amongst you as a faithful pastor and preacher. As a worshipper and servant. As a loving father and husband. As a student of God and His Word. As a wise, courageous, and humble leader. After that, I don't really care. To be known, influential, is a gift and burden better left in the hands of God. He can give or He can take it way. Either way, blessed be the name of the Lord.

I'm sure there are other things that probably should be on this list, but they didn't come to mind. They're not weighing on my heart at this moment in time. I'm sure the list will change over the next five, ten or fifteen years. So be it. The Lord is and be my Shepherd. Our Shepherd.

Pastor Jonathan