

Connie, when you asked me to be a part of your commission and to give the charge to the pastor, of course, my first thought was, "Anything I tell her to do, she's gotta' do it! This could be fun!" But you know me, and my love of a good joke. And you trusted me and wanted me to be a part of this. That meant a lot to me. Over the course of the last few weeks, I've been thinking about what I should say. I've also *wondered* about what I should say. I am not a pastor, so how could I give the charge? But then I realized that you didn't want me to tell you how to be the best pastor there is, although that would be wonderful. You didn't want me to tell you how to grow a huge mega church or to become a world famous televangelist. You wanted me to help you focus on the things that you already know, but are so very vital - the things we all need reminding of once in a while.

The first of these is the most obvious, but can sometimes be the hardest. This is to make sure that you don't get so caught up in church work and churchianity that you tend to forget about Christ's work and Christianity. Don't forget to make time and room for Christ in your daily life. I learned this from two very dear women in my life.

When I was in college, a wonderful woman in our church would often have college students spend a week or two in her home when the pressures of campus life got to be too much. She had four little words displayed all throughout her home - even in her car - stitched in cross-stitch, quilted into a pillow top, carved in wood, printed on

parchment. Those four words were, "Pray While You Wait." She explained to me that she used to get very impatient and irate when she had to wait for anything. But then she realized that she could use that time. Waiting in the checkout at the grocery, she could pray for the people in line with her, for the clerk who was doing her best, for the farmers who produced the food. Waiting in line at the bank or the DMV, she could pray for the teller or the folks around her. She could pray for those who didn't have money enough to need a bank or she could pray for those who had too much and had allowed it to corrupt them. Waiting for a red light, she could pray for the other drivers, the policemen patrolling, the pedestrians hurrying to their jobs or home to their families. She changed her mindset - the time that she used to spend fretting was now spent with God.

My dear Aunt Alma, who really isn't my aunt, but has been like a mother to me since my own mother died when I was very young, has severe scoliosis that was untreated when she was a child. She swims laps at the Y twice each day as part of her therapy. She used to tell me, "You're my lap number 7." I was never sure what she meant by that so finally I asked her. She explained to me that for each lap she swims in the mornings she has a person, a family or a situation that she prays about as she swims that lap. In the afternoon, she spends the time mentally reciting a passage of Scripture, reflecting on its meaning and asking God for his message to her today. She's found a way to turn the tedium of swimming laps for exercise into her own personal time with the Lord.

That is the first part of my charge to you. Make time for God.

The second part of my charge is also very difficult for most of us, but also vital. Make time for yourself. I learned this the hard way and paid dearly for it. Don't let yourself get so caught up in ministry that you forget to minister to yourself. Take time to relax, to do something you really enjoy, to nap if you need to. Cherish your health, both mental and physical, and don't let it become your last priority. Even the most power packed battery, if run non-stop, will run out of power. Don't be that battery. Don't be the Energizer Bunny. It sounds good to say, "She keeps going and going and going . . ." but if you do that, eventually you'll run out of power and become worthless to everyone, including yourself. So this part of my charge to you is to take time for yourself. Relax, recharge, rejuvenate.

The third part of my charge needs a visual demonstration. I was told that this is an old Chinese philosophy. I don't know if that part is true or not, but I do know that it's very worth remembering. Look at your hand. Each finger represents a relationship in your personal life. The thumb represents your parents; the index finger represents your siblings; the middle finger represents yourself; the ring finger represents your spouse and the pinky represents your children. Folding yourself out of the way (we've already talked about the importance of time for yourself) join the fingers of your two hands. Now keeping all the others together, pull your thumbs apart. They separate easily. This is because, although you love your parents dearly, the time came for you to separate from them and make a life of your own. The same goes for your index

finger which represents your siblings. They each have lives of their own separate from you. The pinkies are a little harder to separate, but they do. As much as we hate to acknowledge it, our children do grow up, move out and establish separate lives. But now, try to pull your ring fingers apart. You just can't do it. This is because the relationship with your spouse is one for life. An easy reminder of this is the ring that you wear on that finger.

Now, I could ask one of the people here to pull my fingers apart and they could do it. Other people and outside pressures can be dangerous to this relationship, if you don't guard it diligently. If you allow yourself to become more important than your relationship with your spouse, the relation can be separated easily. So the third part of my charge to you is to make time for Eric - lots of time. Cherish him. Nurture the relationship. Spend time with him in God's presence. But do not neglect that relationship.

Now the final part of my charge is this. Find a dumpee or two. You'll know what I mean by that. You've been in that situation for me a time or two. Sometimes when the pressures of life just become too much, we can pour our heart out to God and that's good, but sometimes you just need someone present, someone you can just dump on. When my daughter was little, we often had those nights that all parents go through with the various bedtime delaying tactics - "I need a drink; I gotta' go potty; I need a hug; I need to brush my teeth; etc." One night her final try was to say, repeatedly, "I'm scared." After repeated assurances that Jesus was with her and he

would take care of her and nothing would happen to her, she settled her case by saying to us, "I want somebody with skin on."

So the final part of my charge to you, Connie, is to make sure you have somebody with skin on. Someone who can listen without judgment; someone who can advise you when you ask for advice; someone who can pray with you when you need prayer; someone who can sit with you in silence when you need it; someone who can cry with you when the tears must flow; and someone with skin on who can throw their arms around you and hug the stuffin' outa' you when you need that too.

The rest of this ministry stuff - you know, the being a pastor stuff? You know what to do. Listen to the people of the church, listen to God, and listen to those around you. And just do what you do best. You were born to be a minister and, although this is your first church, you've been ministering your whole life. So just go with it. Be the minister you are, love your church and your congregation and let it flow. But please, don't neglect you, your relationship with God, your family and your health. That is my charge to you.