

GRACE INSTEAD OF ANGER

I shared with you last week how I was at a meeting on Tuesday night to consider ending the pastoral tie between a minister and a congregation due to financial constraints. The pastoral tie was dissolved at that meeting and one of my responsibilities as a result was to help the minister and congregation agree on a settlement package. Our denomination has a policy to help in these matters and there is a sample agreement to be used as a guide. The head office sent me a sample template of the settlement agreement that I could use to fill in the names and specifics agreed to by both parties. I put together the sample agreement I was given, made the appropriate changes needed to it, and was able to get both the minister and representatives from the congregation to agree to the terms and sign the document. I have had to do this on several occasions and there is always a sense of relief on my part when it is finalized.

Two days after the meeting I was about to forward the agreement to the head office when they informed me that they sent me the wrong version of the settlement agreement. They had sent me the 2015 version instead of the more recent 2018 version. Some of the conditions in the newer version were different from the previous document including the eligibility period the minister would have concerning his insurance and health benefits. Even though it was not my mistake, I was told I would have to go back to both parties and try and get them to sign this newer version.

As you might imagine, I was very upset about the mistake that was made, and the inconvenience it would cause having to get both parties to agree to a new settlement agreement. First, I knew this mistake would result in me having to spend at least 2-3 hours the next day doing up the new version of the agreement. Second, I was upset to think this error might cause the minister in question to have to deal with more stress and grief after the meeting on Tuesday. Third, I pride myself in doing things professionally and competently. Early into this process I had consulted with the head office to make sure I was following everything properly. I assumed they would provide me with the right information, so I could handle this difficult situation properly. I thought I had accomplished that on Tuesday night when both parties signed the settlement. I was upset thinking some might blame me for the mistake.

In my anger I typed an e-mail to head office letting them know how frustrated I was. I held nothing back about my feelings. When I was finished, I was about to hit "send" when I felt a nudge from God. I felt Him saying to me, "I am glad that you have vented, but I want you to save it as a draft, as opposed to sending it." I wanted to send it so badly, but I consented and obeyed. Then I spent the next two or more hours of my day putting together the new version of the settlement agreement.

When I finished, I sent it to the minister. I explained what had happened and apologized for any inconvenience or additional hardship this may have caused him. I did not hear back all day from him. I called at supper time and got no answer. I began to wonder if he might refuse to sign the new agreement. It was not until the next morning I finally heard back from him. He acted with such grace by understanding the mistake that was made and by agreeing to sign the new agreement. On Friday afternoon, the person at the head office who originally sent me the wrong version of the sample agreement finally reached out to me and sent an apology. This was the same individual I was going to send that very angry e-mail to. I responded to their e-mail by telling them not to worry as the minister showed such grace by not being mad and signing the contract. After I sent this response, I received an e-mail back quickly saying, "And you have shown grace too." I almost did not. Remember I was about to hit the send button when God nudged me and said no. If I had not listened to God and sent that angry e-mail, then I would have missed out on showing grace to this person who made the mistake, just as the minister showed me this as well.

Anger is an emotion we can experience at times. There are certain things that can cause us to become angry. I have mentioned in a few of my mid-week messages how this pandemic has made some people become angry. Two weeks ago, at the grocery store I saw two people become very angry with one another because the one individual felt the other was standing too close to him. I heard yesterday how angry one customer at McDonald's became when they were told they could not eat inside the restaurant because they could not provide proof that they were double vaccinated. I think we may see more and more incidents of anger like this. Maybe we have noticed that we are losing control of our emotions and becoming angry more easily because of the frustrations we have endured since this pandemic began. If this is what you

are noticing about yourself perhaps you might be helped by something the prophet Jonah did when he was angry.

What made Jonah angry was God had changed His mind by deciding to show the people of Nineveh grace after they repented of their evil ways. Jonah expressed his anger to God about this decision. In his anger Jonah did acknowledge how God is merciful, compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. I love how God replied to Jonah after the prophet shared his anger with the Lord:

"Is it right for you to be angry about this?" (Jonah 4:4)

I think it would be so helpful for us if we talk with God as Jonah did here when we are angry. We can be open and honest with our feelings talking to God. As we share our anger with God, we will also become aware of how God shows mercy, compassion, unfailing love, and is slow to anger. As we become aware of these attributes hopefully, we will become slow to act out in anger, and quicker to listen to what God has to say. This is what happened to me before hitting the send button on the e-mail. God let me vent first, and then He directed me to save it as a draft rather than sending it. By directing me to do this, God helped me to be viewed as one who shows grace rather than anger. Isn't this the way you would want others to perceive you as well? There is more than enough anger going on in this world right now. We don't need to be adding to it by responding in anger too. What this world is lacking is grace. We have been recipients of God's incredible grace. Whenever we feel ourselves becoming angry, instead of taking it out on others, ***we should be talking to God*** about our feelings, ***listening to His guidance*** as to how to respond, and ***showing incredible grace*** just ***as He does with us***. I am sure thankful that I listened to God and did not hit send. I would rather be known for being a person of grace than anger.

God Bless and Keep Safe

Pastor Dean