

The Gathering

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[0:00] Thank you so much, Aaron. So good to see you all. Really blessed to be here. I heard there was a queue coming up. Was that right? Oh, yeah, that's bad.

We'll try and talk to the management and see if we can get more lifts up. But you know when there isn't a queue? Nine o'clock. No queue then. Ten o'clock. No queue.

10.30 for the pre-service prayer. Guess what? No queue. So if you want to have no queue, that's when you come. But honestly, we're trying to figure things out.

It's a special... It's been actually an exciting but also a reflective week for me because this is the three-year anniversary of us being in the Admiralty Center. Three years. We've been doing this for three years and it feels as though every few months we have to do some kind of changes.

We have to install some kind of fans because people are fainting. We have to add more chairs. We have to change into a different floor. And we are still figuring it out. And what I do really cherish is that we have a community that is willing to have grace and figure it out together.

[1:06] Yesterday we had a group of leaders again just going, what do we do? How are we going to go about this? And where's God leading us? And just constantly trying to communicate and just ask, Lord, what is it that you want from us?

And what is it that you desire for us as a church? And so we're actually going to take a bit of a break from Genesis. We've been going through the book of Genesis since Easter.

So it's been quite a long time. We've gone all the way to Genesis 24 and we're going to take one week intermission. And I realized it's because as I look around now, as I look and I see, I see familiar faces.

I see new familiar faces and I see just completely new faces. And then I'm just like, well, every, again, every few months, I feel as though it's time to do just like a little pause so I can introduce who we are and also a bit of housekeeping and a constant reminder of why we do what we do.

Those gathering statements, honestly, they're there for me. They're there for me because I'm coming every Sunday going, what am I doing here? Why is it that I'm here? And so actually those are almost my mission statements.

[2:03] I'm here because it's a complex time and I'm trying to live in the most simple way that I can. I'm trying to walk daily in the ways of Jesus. I'm trying to know him and I'm trying to enjoy him. That's what I'm trying to do every single day.

And then I'm trying to gather with people who I perceive a spiritual family, people who I'm hoping to raise up, people who I'm hoping will raise up my sons and daughters. Daughter. Only one daughter. No more. We're done. Daughter. So that's it. Three. We're good. Lord have mercy. And then I'm also going, okay, how do we disciple leaders of the next generation?

We started this when I was still part of Young Life, which is now headed up by Aaron. And there's quite a few of you here. How do we pour into the next generation? How do we continue to see people who are growing up, who are young, but are worshipping the Lord and who are choosing to follow the way of Jesus?

And how do we reach those who are on the fringe, who actually, if we don't go out and reach them, they won't even come in. So we're trying to figure that out. Of course, logistically, that means then there's some issue as we try and bring more people in.

[3:00] Then we get more cramps. There's less oxygen to go around. And then we're trying to figure that out. So we are continually praying, Lord, what is it that you want us to do? And I realize a lot of this is on me. It's a humbling experience for me because these last three years have been the most enjoyable, most rewarding, but also the hardest because you're constantly having to make decisions that not everyone likes.

And actually, more importantly, I realize for me, we as a church, we will only go as far as I go in terms of me being a leader.

I think we look at the world right now and what do we see? We see a leadership problem. We see there are not enough godly leaders out there who would humble themselves and lead in a way that God actually desires.

In fact, I personally think you can trace all of the world's problems back to a lack of good godly leadership. And that's humbling and terrifying for me as a leader. And actually, it's Alistair Begg who said this, that the church does not advance beyond the spiritual progress of its leader.

They did a survey 80 years ago for the Anglican church in England and they were looking at all the different parishes around and seeing which of the churches and the communities that are thriving and which ones are not. And you know what they found? It all came down to whether there was a shepherd, there was a leader in that congregation.

[4:14] Oh, that's a humbling, terrifying experience for me to say the least. So I'm constantly asking myself, how am I with the Lord? Do I love the Lord? If I want you to love the Lord, then I need to be growing in the love of the Lord.

If I want you to be reading and abiding in the word daily, then I need to be abiding in the word daily. I want you to be praying. I want you to be scattering. Guess what I need to be doing? Those very things. How do I walk and go from the front?

And that's a tough thing. And I'm going to share with you from a passage today which I hold dearly to my heart. I think it makes it into my prayers on a weekly basis because I can't do without it.

Because when we're talking about what it means to be a shepherd, Jesus talks directly about it.

And actually in John 21, just before he leaves, he picks out one of his leaders who made tons of mistakes, a guy called Peter who denied him three times and by the fire, he goes to Peter in John 21, do you love me?

And if you love me, you'll feed my sheep. For me, that's the constant question that I ask myself.

Lord, do I love you? I should only feed your sheep.

[5:20] I should only pastor if I love you. And I can tell you this. It's an honest confession. You can go by in ministry not loving the Lord. You can completely ignore the Lord.

But that's not my hope and that's not my prayer. And actually, that's my request for a prayer from you to us and to our leaders. Would you continue to pray for your leaders that they would continue to love the Lord, continue to know the Lord and continue to enjoy the Lord.

And of course, after Peter says, yes, I do love you, I do love you, I do love you, unknowingly, knowing that actually Jesus was trying to restore him, restore him for those three times that he actually denied him, he ends up in a place where it's okay, you are now going to feed my sheep.

Peter, many years later, writes a letter. He writes a letter and this is the passage that we're going to focus on today is 1 Peter 5, 1 to 11. And it's talking about how do we as shepherds actually shepherd the flock?

And hopefully, with this intermission, with this bit of a breather from Genesis, which we'll be back in next week, Gabe is going to go into Genesis 25, but this week, we'll just have a breather and go, okay, what is the heart behind everything that we're doing in this?

[6:24] And what is my heart? And what is God's heart for our flock here? So as is our tradition, can I invite you to stand for the word of the Lord? Kelly is going to come up and read it to us and maybe I'll say a quick prayer before we do that.

God, we stand for your word because we don't only respect this, we revere your word. We depend on it.

We are filled with awe that these words are from you, that you would speak to us in a way that we would understand. And Holy Spirit, there are times when we are hard of hearing, we don't understand.

So Holy Spirit, would you guide us today? Would you speak to us today through your word?

Minister to us, Lord. 1 Peter, chapter 5, verse 1 to 11.

Shepherd the flock of God. 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.

[7:30] 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, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders.

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Be sober-minded, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

[8:55] To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. Thank you, Kelly. Just a bit of context here.

He's writing to the church and he's writing this letter and actually, most of the letter, he's actually just talking about suffering. He's saying, when you become a Christian, it's not about health and wealth. It's not about how you then have your purpose that makes you feel completely satisfied and then you can walk around happy, singing in the rain.

It's way more than that. In fact, there's going to be a lot of suffering that happens in your life. That's what he's talking about. And then in chapter 4, verse 17, he says, there will be judgment. There will be judgment and it will start first where?

It will start first with the church. The church who has received the good news, who has been entrusted with this good news, who knows how to live, who at least knows how they should live, judgment is going to start with the church. And then he jumps into this leadership passage, which tells me that it not only starts with the church, it starts with the leaders of the church.

And actually, for us as we're here, you might be sat here going, oof, thank goodness I don't have to be in the pulpit every week. Oof, thank goodness that I'm not an actual pastor and a leader. No, I'm talking about anyone who's a leader for me. I'm looking at this passage going, oh, this is what it means to be a leader.

[10:04] Of course, 1 Timothy 3 says, he who desires a leadership role to be an elder, that is a noble thing. So we should all continue to strive to be the leaders in our communities, in our families, in our workplaces, in our friendship groups.

But right now, he's talking to these elders here and it's funny because he's talking to them as a fellow elder himself. So he's kind of going, say, hey, I'm the same as you. And then he starts on this passage. So he's talked about suffering. He's talked about judgment that will come and he says judgment will start from the church.

So the church needs to not have any hypocrisy. Say what you believe, do what you believe and actually live it out so that the world can see. Sadly, that rarely happens sometimes, right, is what we feel.

People outside keep saying, I don't go to church because of the hypocrites. And that's just the heartbreaking thing. And you look at this passage, you say, that's not what it's supposed to be. And so then he goes and he talks about the suffering and he says, so I exhort.

That word is an old-fashioned word. Anyone use the word exhort recently in just conversations?

Jojo has? Did you just put your hand up? Well, yesterday. Oh, nice.

[11:06] Between the two of you, look at that. We have some great leaders already in our church. The word exhort for me means, it was actually a word that was used by Greek warriors standing in front of the soldiers trying to exhort them.

What were they trying to do? They were trying to pour courage into them. Encourage. Pour courage into them so that they could go into battle. They were trying to move their hearts. That's what I'm trying to do here. I'm trying to use this book, the word of God, which gives us life, and I'm trying to speak it into your heart so that your heart would be moved so that you would then have a desire to know him more, to enjoy him more.

That's what I'm trying to do. So he's exhorting these elders and he's saying, hey, me, I'm a fellow elder as well. And guess what? Not only am I a fellow elder, I was a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker of the glory that is going to be revealed.

This is interesting. He's saying, if you're going to be a leader, if you're going to be an elder, you will have suffering and you will have glory. How many of us just want the glory? How many of us just want a thriving small group?

Just want a thriving church community? Just want a thriving business? The Bible doesn't seem to talk just about glory. He's talking a lot about suffering as well.

[12:14] Romans 8 talks about this, that if we're going to be glorified with him, if we're going to be raised with him, we also must suffer with him. And so he's talking about suffering in the sense that it's not just about the hype.

There is way more. And actually for Peter, he was a witness to the sufferings of Christ. Why? He was there. He was there when he was dragged from the garden to the cross. He was also there in Mark 9, Luke 9, at the Transfiguration, where he's up in the mountain and he sees Jesus just in all his glory.

So much glory that he's like, Jesus, let's build three tents here and let's just stay here forever. We love the glory that is here. And what does Jesus say? He says, well, no, we're going back down. That passage is fascinating because as soon as they go back down the hill, where do they end up? Into chaos. There is demonic possession. There are seizures happening. And it makes you think, wow, they wanted to stay in the mountaintop, but they had to come back down. But he also knows that at some point the glory is going to be revealed.

That's where Romans 8 comes back in and says, creation is groaning. There is suffering. But my goodness, there is going to come a day where Jesus is going to return and we're going to see that glory again.

[13:22] I, as a fellow elder, exhort you as a witness of the sufferings of Christ as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed. This is my instruction.

This is my advice. Shepherd the flock of God that is among you. Shepherd. Careful. Watch over is what he's saying.

Shepherd the flock of God that is among you. And of course, straight away, we're thinking shepherd. What does a shepherd do? Is anyone a shepherd here? No.

Hong Kong's mostly lawyers, bankers, doctors, no shepherds. But a shepherd, if you go back to Psalm 23, you'll see someone who cares, someone who leads the sheep to the green pastures, to the still waters, to the right path, but also to the valleys, the valleys of the shadow of death.

Also prepares tables in the presence of the enemy in the sense that it protects. The shepherd protects, guides, and pursues. Surely his goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives.

[14:25] A shepherd, someone who cares. And it's interesting here, it says, the shepherd, the flock of God. That, for me, I paused straight away as I read that because it's not shepherd the flock of James or shepherd the flock of Gabe or Christine or Joe or Alex.

It's shepherd the flock of God. You're not actually mine. Thank goodness you are not mine. You are the Lord's. But all that does is make it even harder for me because I'm like, oh, I best look after this. I best look after this because this isn't mine. You guys are not mine. I've got to care for you, watch over you so when the chief shepherd appears, you will be beautiful.

Shepherd the flock of God among you. The word among you is basically the ones in front of you. What does this tell me? I cannot choose who to pastor. If you're sat in this room, I'm hoping to shepherd you, to care for you, to watch over you.

If you're sat in this room, it also goes the other way. You're looking at me and going, well, this is my shepherd. That's all I've got. There's this relationship which is, we're going to shepherd the flock that is in front of us, not the group that we wish to have because when we look at sheep, when we look at each other, when we look at people, it often gets ugly.

[15:43] Inherently flawed is what I am, as are you. But we shepherd the flock, we look after them because they're entrusted to us.

And we exercise oversight to over, just, again, in Psalm 23, you'll see, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Why? Because sheep would wander. So the shepherd would then actually have to use a rod and a staff to drag them out of the bushes, to take them away from the cliff edge. And so it's this constant of just caring and overseeing and to making sure that they're okay.

And I don't do it, it says here, and not under compulsion, but willingly. And I can tell you this, I willingly, and it excites me and it loves me and it's my way of loving you when I come up to open up this word to you every day because I know that this is how I'm going to love you, this is how I'm going to shepherd you by telling you not just my wisdom and not just my truth because there is

limited wisdom and truth that comes from me, but from this book.

And I love that. And no one's forcing me to do this. I loved being a teacher in England. I can imagine sometimes going back to there because the students would do what I say. You guys don't really do what I say, but I love it.

[16:56] I love it and I wouldn't choose to be anywhere else is what I'm saying. Not for shameful gain, but eagerly and not domineering over those in your charge.

I'm not here to force anyone. I can't force anyone. Everyone's here by their own volition. Everyone here has to make that decision to follow Jesus themselves. That's a hard one for me and I'll talk a little bit more about this later, but I have this idol which is control.

I want to, well, mostly control myself and the circumstances around me, but that can translate into how I shepherd the flock. I can't force anyone to do anything. I'm not here to do that. All I'm here to do is to then be an example to you.

We've had a group called The Fellowship this last year where we were challenging each other going, what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus in Hong Kong where schedules are packed? And so we decided, actually, if this is the most important thing in our lives, we will make time to read the Bible.

We will make time to pray for one another and guess what? We did. Every day, well, every weekday, we managed to do that but the main premise of that was, hey, I'm not going to force you to do this but here's the real challenge.

[18:03] How about you call yourself higher and me as your shepherd, I'll simply hold you there because we all know we need people around us to help us. We need accountability.

accountability. I have, again, I've shared publicly that I've been trying to exercise more and one day I'll be able to beat my wife in a wrestling match and so therefore I signed up to the gym and I had brothers around me who will remind me, have you done leg day?

And I said, I don't want to do leg day. Leg day's painful. But they're like, no, it's important for your overall health as you're building muscle everywhere. You need leg day. So I do it once a week, one set and that's it.

But we need people around us to do this. But the whole point is I can't do it for you. I can't force you to do anything. I wouldn't want to. But you call yourself higher and I promise I can hold you there or at least I will try to hold you there.

I will do it with you is what I'm saying. I'll be an example to you. 1 Corinthians 9.27 is what was etched onto my basketball shoes as a university player and it said, I discipline my body, training it to do what it should lest after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.

[19:15] For me, I'm all about, if I want you to do it, I'm going to do it first and I'm going to do it more. I discipline myself because the last thing I want is to tell you to do it and then you end up doing it and I don't and then I end up being disqualified.

That's not what I want. That's why Paul says, 1 Corinthians 11.1, imitate me as I imitate Christ. Like look, we all want to follow Jesus. We want to follow in the ways of Jesus but Jesus we can't see right now.

It's pretty hard but guess who they saw at that point? Paul. Guess who you can see at this point?

You can see me. You can see Jojo. You can see Kelly. You can see Hank. You can see Gabs. You can see people who, okay, they're doing it. I'm going to follow them.

That's the whole point of why we're gathering here together because it's hard to do it on our own but once we start seeing other people do it who are setting the example for us, then maybe we have a better chance of doing it ourselves.

Shepherd the flock of God among you. Not domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, oh, that's it.

[20:13] So I'm not the boss. Thank goodness. I'm the under shepherd. There is a chief who's coming. There is a glory that is going to be revealed and when he comes, I will receive the unfading crown of glory as will those who are leading, who are laying your lives down for the people that you're trying to lead.

When you're pulling teeth, pulling people, if you stay, if you stay on that road, if you continue to persist, when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

That's the one that a racer gets. That's the one that an athlete gets. That's the one that the warrior gets. The crown belongs to you should you do all of this. But before he carries on with that, he then

says, stop.

Likewise, you who are younger, Mervyn, Jasper, Hannah, who else is younger? There's lots of people who are younger here. He turns and he says, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. That's a, he kind of, he's on the same topic but then he kind of turns on the young people. He says, look, you're around a lot of people who are older than you and you might think that you know everything and they don't get this new era, this new generation of way of doing things.

[21 : 19] He turns to them and he says, hey, be subject to the elders. This is a tough one. This is a tough one because you've got to look at the people above you and often you disagree with them because they don't understand you either.

But when he's talking to the church, when he's talking to the younger people, he's saying, hey, you're still going to have to be subject to the elders. There is still wisdom there. I find myself, okay, so I think, I feel as though personally, this is a bit of a sharing of a midlife crisis situation right here, is I think the young people think I'm old and the old people think I'm young.

And I'm kind of, I'm kind of stuck in this middle ground. At least that's what I think anyway. But, I think what happens is I end up getting to see both sides. The older people looking at the young ones going, oh, we can't trust them.

We can't trust them. They make stupid mistakes. And on the whole, you know, you're pretty stupid. You know, because you make stupid mistakes, as did we. But then the younger people are like, you don't understand us.

You don't understand us and you don't even know how to use your phone. All you know is how to crush the candy and that's it. And you know, no one uses Facebook anymore. And I sit in the middle and I'm going, you know what, there's such great things that can be learned from both sides.

[22 : 30] If only both sides are willing to listen. If only the young people will just look up and go, wow, you've lived so many more years than I. Yes, I really was in nappies when you were already doing this thing called life.

There is something to learn from you, even the mistakes that you made. There's something that I can learn from you. And for an older person to then say the same and going, oh, wow, how do you use this device?

How do you join the TikTok? Oh, you have to move out of Hong Kong. Okay. And he carries on and you know that's what he's saying because he says, clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another.

So he says, clothe yourselves with humility but then he says, all of you, just before the old people cross their arms and say, yes, you young people, be subject to us. He turns, he says, all of you, humble yourselves toward one another for God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. And this next part is the prayer that I pray always. So therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties onto him because he cares for you.

[23 : 43] That's my prayer so often. he touches on the topic that I think is the most important topic, humility. Humility.

I'm reminded of a somewhat prideful and embarrassing moment for myself. Growing up as a young pastor and who liked to talk, I saw, I met a pastor who was very well known, very experienced in speaking and I said, hey, I've got a couple people who, you know, around the same age as me, same stage in ministry, would you like to mentor us and teach us how to speak, how to speak like you?

And then he just said, no. I was like, oh. I said, I said, why? He said, well, I think I've done that quite a lot and one of the dangers of that is if someone has the gifting but they don't have the character or the humility, it just ends up in the wrong place.

He'd been in ministry for 42 years and every scandal, every moral failure, every just problem that has happened in the church comes from this issue called pride. What happens before the fall?

Pride. And he's talking to everyone, young and old. He's talking to you and me and you and you. Clothe yourselves. Clothe yourselves in the sense that it's not natural to you.

[24 : 58] You don't wake up and suddenly you're humble. In fact, it's almost unnatural. You have to go and deliberately, intentionally go and clothe yourself with humility toward one another for God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble.

And then he moves into anxiety which is really interesting because he goes humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God and then he says casting all your anxieties onto him because he cares for you and that speaks to me.

I humble myself under the mighty hand of God and then, I mean, I'm a very anxious person so I cast my anxieties onto him. He's not jumping topics here. It's the same thing. Why? Because anxiety is actually a form of pride.

If you're an anxious person, if you're anxious about studies, if you're anxious about your work, if you're anxious about your relationships, did it ever occur to you that you're actually being prideful? John Piper says this, anxiety is a fruit of pride because it is an attempt to carry a weight that only God is designed to bear.

Humility casts its burdens, pride clings to them. Let me read that one more time. Anxiety is a fruit of pride because it is an attempt to carry a weight that only God is designed to bear.

[26:15] Humility casts its burdens, pride clings to them. As a leader, I think about that all the time. I have lots of anxieties about how to keep a big group of people in a small office space in Hong Kong cool.

How to fit everyone, how to welcome people. So, you know, you were very kind in saying the gathering was very welcoming, but the truth is it's so big, we can't really quality control that. Someone can walk in here for a whole month and not have anyone speak to them, and that breaks my heart. There's nothing, we can't, we haven't got a system in place yet to figure that one out. So I'm anxious about that. I'm anxious about the life groups that we have.

I'm anxious about the leaders that we have. Are these groups growing towards Jesus or are they just becoming social groups where they're just wanting to hang out? I have all these anxieties as a pastor. Am I shepherding the flock well?

And then God reminds me, you know that anxiety that you have, James, about a pretty good thing which is trying to care for people? Well, that's pride. Because this isn't your flock. One of the first people that I disciplined was when I was 19, I was in second year university, I had a friend who was two years younger than me, brought him to Christ and then I would lose sleep over him for the next four years because he then showed up at university, started hanging out with the wrong crowd and I would spend, how do I stop him from hanging out with that crowd?

[27:33] How do I stop him from going to these parties? How do I stop him from doing all these things? And I would get so caught up. I'd be like a parent lying in bed going, where is he?

1 a.m. He must be still out. Every parent just has that sad laugh. We all know what that feeling is. And then God reminded me then going, whew, who taught, you're treating him like your project. You're treating him like he's yours. He's not. He's mine. Shepherd of the flock of God that is among you and cast all your anxieties onto him.

What about you? If humility is the key trait of whether you truly understand and grasp what the gospel is, do you have this humility? C.S. Lewis has that quote which is, humility is not thinking any less of yourself.

It's simply thinking of yourself less. So you're not so self-centered. My favorite quote of humility is being as close to the truth as possible.

[28:35] C.S. Lewis has another quote which is, the best view of a man is from below. Recently quoted in the Odyssey as well. Because when you look at how someone treats someone who is junior to them, you will see whether they are truly humble or not.

Paul talks a lot about this in 1 Corinthians that it's not the wisdom of the world that we need. We need people who are willing to be fools for Christ. Who recognize that any wisdom that we have, any consulting firm that has these great things to teach you about how to live and how to make profits, that is just the wisdom of the world.

And that's foolishness when it comes to the wisdom of God. And then be sober-minded. Be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, is prowling like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. I look at all of us here and I'm like, the moment we leave this sanctuary, we go out, we are bombarded by messages and images that we are not enough.

You've got voices in your offices that tell you what you should be doing, the roles you should be pursuing. And what's that? For me, that's just the adversary, the devil, prowling around, seeking someone to devour, someone to just pluck away.

[30:05] But then it says, resist him, firm in your faith. And actually, it's interesting, I looked into this this week and I was praying over this passage, the Bible actually never says, flee from the

devil, never run away from the devil.

The closest thing is James 4, verse 7, which says, submit yourselves to the Lord and the devil will flee from you. Sorry, submit yourselves to the Lord and resist the devil and he will flee from you. This imagery that the devil is a prowling, roaring lion, what Paul and Peter do not say is, fight him. Because I don't think there's anyone who can fight and beat a lion.

I look around this room, I mean, maybe Gabs and Ken might have a chance at doing it. But it doesn't say, stand up to the lion, fight him.

It says, resist. It's really interesting. Submit yourself to the Lord, resist the devil and the devil will flee from you. So actually, this lion that's prowling around, whilst it looks scary, doesn't actually have any power over us.

[31:05] Isn't that interesting? This prowling lion doesn't have any power over us. Psalm 23, 4, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, it's not even real.

It's a shadow of death. Imagine if we lived in such a way where that lion cannot touch us and all we need to do is resist and stand firm in the faith.

And knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world, that what you're going through right now, you are not alone. That's one of the enemy's lies as well. That everything that you're going through, whether it's with your relationship that you have, at work, at studies, whatever it is, and the temptations that you're facing, you're not alone.

It's being experienced while you're brotherhood all around the world. You are not alone. I think that's another reason why we gather, to remind ourselves that we are not alone. And after you have suffered a little while, so just nonchalant, so casual, okay, you're going to suffer, but you're going to suffer a little while, but you're going to be okay.

It's 2 Corinthians 4, 17. It says, do not lose heart. Though your outer cells are dying, wasting away day by day, your inner cells are being renewed. And these light momentary afflictions, light, feather-like, momentary afflictions are nothing when compared to the eternal weight of glory that awaits you.

[32:30] There's going to be, there is suffering, but it's going to be only a little while when compared to the glory that is going to be revealed when the chief shepherd comes back. Hang on. If you are suffering, you are in the right place.

More importantly, God is with you. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, he himself will be the one that restores you, confirms you, strengthens you, and establishes you.

Not the shepherd, not the ordained pastor, he himself will do it. He will restore you. Whatever's broken, whatever's fractured in your life, in your heart, he will be the one that restores it.

And then when it says confirm and strengthen, he's going to be the one that stops you from collapsing on yourself. He's going to be the one that stops you from toppling over in this life. And he is the one that's going to establish you and root you in the ground so that you won't fall away.

He himself. The lion can do nothing. The pastor that you have is simply an under-shepherd Called just to exercise oversight and be an example to you, to care for you. But you can take encouragement that the chief shepherd is coming back and all you will have to do is suffer a little while and then he will call you to his eternal glory.

[33:48] Of course, when we think about the shepherd, when we think about Psalm 23, we're only really thinking about one person. Jesus. The shepherd who, if we have him, we will lack nothing.

We will have no wants. Jesus is the one who leads us to the green pastures where we will be fed with the truth of God, the bread of life. He is the one who leads us beside still waters where he will grant us peace, this peace that this world cannot give.

He was the one who will lead us on the path of righteousness, the right path for us, for his namesake. It will be for him. And sometimes that path will lead you to the valley of the shadow of death.

But even when you're there and you're surrounded by shadows and you're surrounded by roaring lions, you will not fear because his rod and his staff is the one that guides and comforts.

In fact, your greatest fear, whatever your greatest fear is, he invites you to come and sit at the table with that fear because he's prepared it there. He's not even afraid. He's chilled. He's sat down.

[34:53] And when he anoints you, your cup overflows. And all this while, while you've been a sheep, trying to cling on to the shepherd, trying to pursue him, thinking that the Christian life is hard, guess what?

Surely his goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life. It's not been you chasing after him. It's been him chasing after you all along. That is the true shepherd.

That is the chief shepherd who laid his life down for us and humbled himself to the point of death, even death on the cross. He who gave us his crowns, he gave us his robe so that we would have life.

That should humble us to the core and anxiety should flee. We're going to take communion later, but before that, I'm going to invite a friend up. I said I've been trying to do this a little bit more.

We won't do this every week, but when it comes to shepherding, it'll be of great comfort and consolation to you that I am not the only one who is shepherding this flock here. We have a group of leaders that we all met last night, but then there's a smaller group called the lead team that has been here from pretty close to the beginning.

[36:04] I'm going to invite a dear friend up, Alex Lee. We're going to have a little chat and hopefully he'll tell you some stuff that maybe I have no way of telling you either. Can we give you a round of applause? Hey, Alex.

Let's take a seat so you don't look as tall. Thank you. Tell us about yourself. About myself?

Well, my name is Alex. Alex. I grew up in the States. I'm sorry. The son of two immigrants who left Taiwan to raise me in the States with nothing and so I spent most of my life in the States before coming here to Hong Kong.

now married to my wife, Cara. Congratulations. Thank you. And I moved here at the very start of COVID to marry Cara to start my new job in the global telecommunications industry and then fast forward kind of six and a half years later and meeting yourself and just many people in this body. Just grateful to be seated here now and of course we had our two young daughters as well who were upstairs and here we are. And did you go to the same college as Hank? Is that... We did.

[37:23] Wow. Not at the same time. 100 years apart or something like that. Roughly speaking. And of course you're here to leaders and servers as well and you're always encouraging to me and I share this passage with you at the beginning of the week and you've been ruminating over it and praying over it.

What's come to mind for you that you think is good to bring up here today? I think the first thing I mean before even like speaking about this specific passage is I think my main takeaway and kind of well honestly meditating over this not just this week but as a lead team we went through this I can't remember maybe three six months ago now and the very kind of obvious takeaways for all of us is like oh this is this is just a passage about leadership and then we read this again last month and honestly what God was speaking in that moment to me was this is a passage about identity because you read verse one and you see just how in tune Peter is I mean of course I mean you probably have to read the rest of first Peter to kind of understand like the rest of the book is a book about what does it mean to be a Christian?

What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ? What does it mean to follow him to endure his sufferings? Like he talks literally just about suffering at the end of chapter four just before this so really this leadership piece is almost kind of just like a small appetizer like in the middle of it but really I think yeah it just kind of weighed on me just how Peter just really wanted the church at this time to understand just how much the glory of Christ weighed on him and our life group talked about kind of like earlier this week what does it what does God's glory even mean?

so to just really set in on that and just try to understand Peter and his shoes and he just really intimately knew Christ I mean he's one of the guys that like walked with Jesus and I think that before you do any sort of leading any sort of serving I think that that identity piece is just so key so that was the reflection when we got together about a month ago and then just ruminating over this probably every day this week I think by the time I got to Friday I messaged you I was like okay because you're like hey what should we have a dialogue on and I know your sermon just covered which is impressive you covered literally everything and there's just so many different topics in here but it just came back again to oh let's just have a discussion on leadership but even before doing that I think probably my exhortation and encouragement to this group to this church would probably be that I mean God's word is just it's beautiful right if you haven't opened it in a long time or you feel like you struggle to open it on like a regular basis I would just say I'll just start just start small start

somewhere I mean that's literally what I did for my devotional this week is I just read these 11 verses every day in the morning it wasn't don't get me wrong I didn't sit there for like two hours with noise cancelling headphones on just taking this in maybe it was just a couple minutes a day but if that's you I mean I would just encourage you like put away the put away the the barrier which is the Bible 365 plan and the intimidation that comes with that and I can't get started and just pick any passage honestly I would encourage you to pick this passage because it's there's just so much in this passage that I feel like God speaks to different people in different seasons but maybe the last thing I'll add before we continue is I think just the very last thing is we had settled on discussing leadership on Friday and then Saturday morning I hadn't even told you I was like I think verses 6 to 11 like I'm reading it God's word is good but I'm I don't think I can take away much to like discuss here but then lo and behold I think yesterday morning it was that probably like that last half that was kind of speaking to me more and God was reminding me of I guess just like what suffering looks like in my own life you know certain challenges that I'm facing with like my parents and my mom and just being like reminded to pray over those things and then lo and behold that same morning

[41:25] I bumped into this sister from another church that we serve in prison ministry with and it was just like a total chance encounter at the mall and she was just sharing with me some of her burdens and challenges she was facing and raising her adult son so just the beauty in getting to meditate on this passage to encounter each other and then to pray together that morning just reminds me of like what happens when we really allow ourselves to we really allow the Holy Spirit to minister to ourselves and to lead us as we open God's word so that's probably where I would start before even anything else we go into leadership today and you talk about your journey of leadership whether it's actually your own experience of the leaders that God placed above you and then of course now coming here and growing into leadership role yourself what's some of the reflections that you had that are tied in with this passage yeah I think in terms of maybe like my personal journey with leadership I never choose to be a leader I mean from the I think my earliest memory of being a leader is in the third grade in the US is like when you're eight years old and my mom's like hey you should run for like student government for your class and I was like so the dork

I'm not like I wasn't like popular kid it's like dorky Asian kid in the most mostly like western American school right and then somehow I mean obviously my mom's just having like Ivy League dreams of me at like eight years old and no I did not I did not go to Ivy League but at least I made it to the same school as Hank that's my that's my saving grace and so I was kind of lo and behold ended up winning this student election and getting to leave of course I couldn't tell you like anything about it other than the fact that I was coerced into doing it and then all the way to an adult now you know in my work several years ago my boss asked me can you help me can you can I put you in charge of my like organization redesign I was like sure you're definitely asking the wrong person but I'll help anyway and every draft and every iteration I gave him at this time I was an individual contributor and led no team at work every draft I gave him was like yep we should grow this space we should grow Bill's team we should grow Bob's team and you know you should kind of maybe merge like Mike and Matt's teams together and you know there's your design and it just kind of keeps me in my own space and every time he came back he's like actually we should put more of the stuff in your team I was like I don't have a team he's like well you should I was like I would not like to lead a team so no matter the 10-15 drafts I brought back to him every time that didn't include me leading it still came back to him and of course lo and behold I think we know how the story ends I do end up leading so it's not something I often choose but I think you did mention as well as kind of like the leaders and mentors in my life and I think you've mentioned here to everyone many times like we're a product of the kind of five people we surround ourselves with and that's so true for the leaders the shepherds like the elders the mentors in our lives as well and you know I'm just so grateful for just all the different like I just think about all the different leaders I've been able to encounter over the years and how they've poured into me and how they've ministered to me and I think I've had this unique privilege as well in terms of growing up in Texas in the States now being in Hong Kong the thing that connects those two places is they both love pastors they love to put pastors on a pedestal so I think I learned early on just to be discerning about like what does it mean to actually follow good leaders and to understand the heart of a leader not just things they do or their CV but what's like really in their heart and I think I've just been super privileged in terms of every step along the way having kind of those good leaders who have that good heart but then on

the flip side of things I think leaders are also a product of the people they lead as well and I think if we think about that that kind of verse two when we talk about shepherding the flock that is among you exercising oversight not under compulsion but willingly not for shameful gain but eagerly as well like I'm just grateful that in this time like in our gathering like I would say like leading and just journey alongside all the people leading alongside the people

I've gotten to lead with journey alongside the people and like the different stages of life group like I would say like willingness and eagerness just like defines that which I'm grateful for because that's not common to be honest in many churches and I specifically remember a moment I think we had a leaders meeting at your place I think one time I can't remember why but I remember God's words were just so clear to me in that moment which was like like for whatever reason I was just reflecting on past seasons of not just leadership but just like being in community and God's word was just like oh it just keeps it keeps getting better and that's just genuinely how I feel about this community and just the privilege it is to lead here to learn from so many people and yeah so definitely someone who's just been shaped by both the leaders and the people I've got to lead as well we had a fun conversation well maybe fun's not the right word a challenging conversation as we were leading up to this in terms of actually the things that you disagree with me with how do you keep me humble? [46:45] other than jokes about buying shoes and calling you out in front of your wife and things of that nature so I think kind of going back to that heart of like I guess I think you've known me for what six years now and I think you know I've never had the kind of like pastor is the the prime person and don't get me wrong because I know there's people in this space and I do want to recognize as well there's people who maybe have been upset or frustrated or even hurt by church leadership or pastors in the past so it is a very difficult job to walk and to well essentially you do a lot of talking but it's a difficult job to walk the talk as well and to quote unquote keep so many people happy even though that's not really meant to be the end goal at the end of the day but I would say in terms of I guess keeping you honest again it's it's probably for me it's I always look at your heart as well when people ask me they're like you know maybe they see pictures online we're hanging out like people back home in the states are like who's the bald guy you've been hanging out with so much

I'm like my temptation every time is like oh that's my pastor but actually that's my friend like that's probably the first word I would think of followed by like my brother before I even think about calling you like my pastor to my friends back home so I think just thinking about you know inverse what is it inverse what is this inverse where's our example inverse I've lost it now first three yeah I think first and foremost I just think about the example you lead with each and every day I see how you lead your family so I take all those things into kind of context like before we even jump into like just different church decisions and even as we do that I think I think you and I it's not like we have deep disagreements but it's it's recognizing that you know I'm willing to say like oh this maybe I don't agree with how you want to do something but I always know why like I always know the heart behind it I think a cheap like a cheap example that is like you really want to get to know everyone that comes in the door and I'm the like corporate pragmatist that's like think about the most productive efficient way to like to use your time because maybe a lot of people that walk in the door actually maybe not maybe don't even want to spend time or get to know you either as well so I think it's just like in those moments

I think you have the humility to kind of receive that feedback and I think a lot of times you just input like you immediately change your approach you know anytime we give you feedback whether it's myself or Gabe or Joe or other leaders as well final thing just what's the prayer for all of us here as a community as we either seek to become leaders or already leaders and what are we what are we praying for I think the probably final thing is because we've had different discussions like as a leadership team we're like oh what's the mark of a leader and I think every time it just comes back to we start to go through like this proverbial list and every time it's really like these are really just the marks of a disciple just like someone who follows Jesus it has nothing to do with the kind of position they're in or the particular responsibilities they have it's just like you know people who follow Christ will live sacrificially for others they'll love others well they will minister to people like whether or not you believe you'll fit the description of a shepherd

I think you kind of touched on it earlier I think honestly like I know there's different giftings there's different ways in how people love to minister as well but honestly I think everyone does have this kind of gift of shepherding in some regard whether it's I mean it could just be your like you know your spouse your kids you know I know there's Christina mentioned there's just so many people

who are just like introverts you know it's I don't feel like I can go out of my way but it's like who is who's already in your way you know who are the people that God has clearly entrusted in your care how do you go deep with them how do you humble yourself before them how do you recognize the anxiety that they carry how do you journey alongside with them and that so that's probably the encouragement I leave everyone with is this passage is really a call to discipleship is a call to follow Christ and you know as we do those things would we just open ourselves to Holy Spirit to lead us in terms of our shepherding thank you very much for your time thanks thank you give him a round of applause I think not everyone is called to be a shepherd but I think everyone has been called to make disciples right and what does that look like for you what does it look like for me it is different there are

I'll quickly reel off some of the needs that we have we need a welcome team we need someone to help actually help newcomers feel welcome and actually if you've been part of this church for maybe three months and you remember what it's like to come into a sea of people that you're just completely unfamiliar with and you're freaking out over that maybe you are perfectly qualified now to become one of the welcome team members to help we need help with youth we need help with youth stepping into the lives of even younger people just constantly for me it's just can generations just keep pouring into the next generation so we need people who are willing to do that we need people who are willing to teach the kids upstairs people who are willing to serve in the worship team and AV and there are so many different opportunities all of it is really that mission statement second point that can we just come and use the gifts that we've been given but all of it comes back to just the one thing there's one metric that I measure my own heart with and I hope that you would measure yours with it's just would we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and cast our anxieties onto him he who himself had the crown had the robe but emptied himself who took the form of a servant becoming just like us humbled himself to the point of death even death on the cross and now we finish by looking to this chief shepherd and some of the last words that he said to us which was over communion and so we're going to have a time now where we'll have the elements that are passed around if you are a follower of

[52:43] Christ and you've been baptized into this community then we welcome you to take this with us if you don't understand what it is that is completely okay just simply just pass it along and it's only going to be a few minutes and then we'll be wrapping the service up afterwards so can I just invite you to just close your eyes and bow your heads so just turn your eyes to the Lord