

The Motives of Leaders

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. Good to see you. If it's your first time here, welcome you. It feels very messy today, but I can assure you it feels messy every single week.

! But it's part of our goal to figure out what it is that we're even here to do and to keep ourselves in this uncomfortable state almost. I love this idea that this church is one that is limited in comfy seats because we don't just gather, we scatter, we spend time doing different things.

And we're going to fight for the time that we have here. We're going to fight for space for our kids. And if you are here with your kid and you're like, whoa, what's going on here? Where have the kids been taken? We assure you they are very, very safe. And we are always trying to figure out ways to bring them closer.

There's venues that we're looking at even nearby here to see how we can give them a space where they can actually really, one, feel valued and two, be in a safe space to learn. That's something that we're trying. If you have ideas, please let us know as well. We're trying to figure this out on the go. So that's one thing. The other thing is we're carrying on through One Thessalonians. And it's a big one. It's a heavy one. And this one is for this week. But actually, this has been something that has been ruminating in my heart for a long, long time now.

[1:15] And I'll tell you a little bit more. But before then, why don't I invite you to stand for the word of the Lord? God, we hang on your every word.

Your word gives life. Your word has power. Power enough to penetrate into the very depths of our souls. To transform our lives on the outside as well.

And so we don't take it for granted. The fact that we have this book. That we have this way. And so we cling on to every word now. Holy Spirit, would you shine a light on the bits that you want us to hear?

We know that's all of it, but you know that we are limited in our capacity. So would you help us? Would you guide us as we read this word? That your will would be done, is all that we ask.

The first letter of Paul to the Thessalonians. We are on chapter 2. For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.

[2:23] But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive.

But just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, and so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed.

God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.

So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil.

We worked night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses. And God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers.

[3:25] For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you receive the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the

word of God, which is at work in you believers.

For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out and displeased God and opposed all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles, that they might be saved.

So as always to fill up the measure of their sins, but wrath has come upon them at last. But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person, not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly, and with great desire to see you face to face, because we wanted to come to you. I, Paul, again and again, but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.

This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. So the church in Thessalonica is two years old. Not very different from this.

[4:46] And Paul starts it, and we see this in Acts 17. He starts it, and then he gets run out of town. Why? Because the Jews there are saying, what is this? Why are you turning things upside down?

Is what he's saying. Is what they're saying. And then basically they get sent out. Him and Silas get sent away. And then they're just thinking about this church. Man, those people that we started something with. That was so good.

I wonder how they're doing. And so he's writing to this church now. And of course, there's something that's happening. Because whilst he's writing to them, and while this church is growing, and last week I said about they were known for their work of faith, and labor of love, and steadfastness of hope.

This was a solid church. This was a solid group of people who really were transformed by the Lord. And he says, I've heard such good things. Heard great things about you guys. But I'm also hearing something else.

There are people out there who are trying to tear my name apart. Because now I'm gone, the Jews there are like, hey, who's that guy who started your thing anyway? Like, is he legit?

[5:47] Was he real? Because you've got to understand, at that time, there were tons of leaders and tons of prophets who were doing things for their own personal gain. Have you heard of that? Have you heard of leaders that would dare to use their authority and abuse it?

And to cause people to trust them, only to then turn it back for their own personal gain? And that was the culture that was in. And so the people outside were like, hey, that Paul, that Silas, that Timothy, those people that started your thing that you guys are going so well in, actually, maybe they weren't so good at all.

They were trying to smear his name. And so then he comes back and he writes this letter. And basically what he's saying in this letter, this part of the letter is, hey, you guys know me. You know my motives and you know my methods.

You know my motives and you know my methods. What he's talking about, what he's sharing about is his heart as a leader. People ask me, every time we go back home to England, people ask me, hey, what are you learning?

What have you learned in these last five and a half years that you've been in Hong Kong? The thing that I would say the most is leadership. The Lord has been showing me that leadership is hard.

[6:59] Leadership is hard. And there are not many leaders, good leaders out there. I don't know about you, but growing up I had this concept, I had this idea that the adults knew what they were doing.

People are kind of just giggling at that now because I'm like, oh, I'm sure, I'm sure. I'm sure there's a group of people around a table somewhere or with the letter C in front of their title who know what's happening, who will make the right decisions.

Didn't you have that concept? Except I think if there's one thing that Hong Kong has taught me in these last five years is, whew, the people at the top aren't always that sure about what they're doing.

Honestly, there was a moment maybe a couple of years ago I was looking around at the world leaders. And I'm not smart enough to get involved into politics and all those kinds of things, but there was just a moment where I just glanced across the whole world and looked at the world leaders that were in place.

It was a time where in my home country we had a guy called Boris, and then there was a guy called Donald, and then there was a guy called Vlad. And I'm just like, oh, Lord Jesus, if there was a moment to come back, now might be the good time to come back.

[8:11] If you were thinking about when should I pull the plug on this mankind experiment, as I looked at that world leadership, I was like, oh, it could be now. Is that all we have? I have a friend who's part of a consulting company, and he said there is a premium on leadership right now, on good leadership.

And those of us who spend a lot of time with the next generation, and if you are the next generation, you'll probably share this sentiment, you don't really trust your leaders anymore. You don't trust them anymore because you're just seeing them just make mistake after mistake, getting exposed for different scandals all around the world.

And you're like, you know what, you guys don't know what you're doing. And as I then stepped into leadership, I was like, oh, I can confirm that now. I don't really know what I'm doing. There are things that I'm like, oh, is that the right decision?

Should we be doing that? You see, if we make this decision, this group will be happy, but this group won't be. And then I realized from actually, so I was a secondary school teacher for seven years in England. I used to be the one who sat at the back of the classroom during the staff meetings, just kind of slouched because it's been a long day, and I'm a cool teacher.

And just let the headmasters and let the head of whatever do whatever the thing, and they can tell us, and we're just going to sit at the back and just chill. And then I was like, oh, they're making such a bad decision there. And then once I'm there myself, I'm like, oh, when the book stops with you, you realize that target is now on your back.

[9:39] And now you understand when they make that decision, yes, there are people who will be unhappy, and there'll be people who are ecstatic about your decision, and you're just stuck in the middle. Leadership is hard.

I had a friend tell me that he's a head of Asia for a company, and he said, if I was to describe leadership, leadership is basically an invitation for people to go on a suboptimal journey. Leadership is inviting people with you onto a suboptimal journey, saying, actually, life is not perfect. The world is not perfect. Our company doesn't have unlimited resources. We do not have the perfect people.

It is suboptimal. But why do we need leaders is because it's suboptimal. We need discernment. We need to make hard decisions. And so it's a suboptimal journey, and I'm inviting you to come along that.

We're not pretending that we have everything together, but we're going to try and figure it out. In some ways, Paul is going here, hey, I need you to know, I need you to remember my motive for being a leader and my methods for how I did it.

[10:40] Now, because Scripture says, well, you might say, well, actually, leadership is so hard. Why does anyone want to be a leader? And that is so true. And there is a fatigue of leadership when you're so tired of leading, when you're so tired of having to make decisions and then being stabbed behind the back.

But then why keep leading? 1 Timothy 3, Paul says, hey, those who desire the role of leadership, it's a noble task. It's a hard one. You'll be measured differently. But we should.

We should desire it. We should aspire to be a leader. Why? Because through that, we can bring about God's kingdom into our own sphere of influence.

John Tyson said, what is leadership? Leadership is godly influence towards God's will. Godly influence towards God's will or God's agenda.

You may be disgruntled with leadership. Maybe you watched The Wizard of Oz when you were growing up, and you were like, what's that really about? It's such a strange story.

[11:38] In some ways, it's a commentary of the cynicism that we face in society about leadership. That behind everything, behind the facade, behind the big shadow and the big voice, is this insecure little man who doesn't know what he's doing, who's scared.

Now, I don't speak on behalf of all the leaders in this world, and there are some leaders here who are great and confident. But I'll say, on behalf of all leaders, and anyone who leads in anything, there's no different to the people sat around here.

The goal is, how do we become a good leader? Leadership is hard, especially, if I just might add, just squeeze in for a little bit, especially for pastors, especially during COVID. I think that was a stat that 70% of pastors worldwide during COVID felt burnt out.

One quote was that pastors became the emotional punching bag of all the anxiety projected onto them by the people they were trying to care for. Let me just say that again.

The pastors became this emotional punching bag where all the anxiety of the people they were caring for was projected onto them. It's your fault that I'm not feeling good. It's your fault that I'm scared.

[12:48] It's your fault that I'm this. And pastors were like, oh, maybe it is my fault. And then they quit and they resign. And some even leave the church. Paul here, in some ways, gives a manifesto for what his leadership is.

He shares his heart about what it is. Because something maybe that pains me the most is, like, growing up as a young leader myself, was seeing leaders that I grew up respecting falling. Right? Do you remember? You've seen those? When they say you never meet your heroes, this is like a different kind of thing as well when you meet them. Or when you have... Okay, so I'll give you an example. And I'll try not to be specific with names.

So growing up, I had three pastors that I really looked up to. Okay? One I'll show you is a guy called Francis Chan. I even copied his hairstyle. And it's...

And we're trying... Side story, it's really funny. One time, him and I were walking down the street here in Hong Kong. It was COVID. So we both had our masks on. And we were both wearing the same green T-shirt.

[13:47] And we were walking. This was leaving the Young Life office because it was during this gab's time. And we were walking. And one of my friends saw us from afar. And she saw me first. And she was like, oh, that's Francis Chan.

And later, she realized, oh, no, it's not. It's just James Tang. But next to James Tang was Francis Chan. It was a moment. So I had him. And I was like, oh, just... Again, last week, I talked about imitating.

And it was just... That's someone I've modeled after. There's another two, though. Maybe I won't share the names because it hasn't been as good of all. One guy was the head of an apologetics ministry. Oh, so smart.

So clever in every way. Just traveling around the world. He was called the machine gun because he could just answer questions. And his mind was just incredible. And then there's another guy who was a leader of a popular church in New York.

Oh, so cool. Honestly, stage presence, second to none. And people are nodding because you know who I'm talking about. And I looked at these three people. I'm like, there's something to learn from all of them.

[14:47] And I just love listening to them speak. They're all very different. And Keller was part of that, too, as maybe the fourth person. But over these last few years, only in these last few years, they just started falling like flies.

And it's not just them, too. You look at America, and I joke about this with Alex Lee because it's from the state that he's from in the great United States of America, where just every other week it seems like there's a megachurch pastor who gets exposed for something.

There's some kind of scandal that is happening now or happened 20 years ago. It doesn't really matter. And then I'm like, gosh, if I was a young person who didn't really know about this Christian thing, and all I'm seeing is these Christian leaders falling, that's just the – I'm not getting anywhere near that thing.

But is that all there is? That we just kind of go, life sucks, leaders suck. Paul's like, no, there is something about this. And he shares about his motives and his methods. And I wanted to share a little bit of that with you today.

He starts with verse 2, and he says this. So, again, if you have your Bible, remember, the Bible only really exists in paper form. The app version does not count. Chapter 2, verse 2.

[15:58] Because I love scribbling on my Bible. I love highlighting it. I love – because it's the way I stay awake and stay focused. And then I look back at it and realize, oh, that was interesting to me a while ago.

And I'll think about that again. So, anyway, verse 2. Well, verse 1, he says, for you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

Do you know what he's saying here? He's saying, do you remember when I first came? It wasn't just for giggles. It wasn't just because I thought this would be a fun thing to do. Hey, let's go and get ourselves arrested and beaten. How fun would that be?

He was like, just remember, I wasn't doing this for my own sake. I wasn't doing this for my own personal enjoyment. This was not fun. Being beaten and put in prison is not fun. And that's what happened in Philippi.

And we remember in Acts 16, he's beaten and he's locked up, and yet he's still singing. And he's like, hey, this was not in vain, and this was not for my own personal thing. There is an issue here that I need you to remember, that my motive wasn't for myself.

[17:01] Now, during that time, there were a lot of leaders, a lot of prophets, a lot of people starting their own thing, all for their own personal gain. And he talks about this in Philippians 2.

That actually, he's heard people sharing the gospel for selfish ambition and conceit. Not sincerely, but thinking of themselves. But then what did he say? What then? Only that in every way, in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed.

He said, look, I know there are people out there who are using Christianity, using the Jesus way, using even my name to preach something so that they can let acclaim. That they can get the things that they want to get.

But he said, that was not the same for me. This was not a fun time. I was beaten in prison for this. And he's really tackling the issue here, and he's defending himself. Because people outside are saying, hey, that Paul, I don't know.

I don't know. Why did he come and do that? Maybe he made a profit somehow. He's like, no, there's an issue of integrity here. You remember why I came. There's an issue of authority here.

[17:59] Because he's saying, hey, it's not me if we carry on. Verse 3. For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive. But just as we have been approved by God. He said, I'm not coming and saying, hey, I'm the one.

I'm the chosen one. Listen to me. He's saying, hey, I've been sent by God. I've been approved by God. There is an authority here that isn't just of this world. And I'm not here just to flatter you.

We've all heard that, right? When you want someone to do something for you, the best way is to flatter them. It's to say nice things about them. But he's saying, I didn't do that.

I came to do one thing, to tell you the truth. Do you have people around you like that? I had the privilege of meeting someone who was fairly famous.

And actually, one of the things that he was sharing to me about when he had a season of being a celebrity was, you just don't know who to trust. Because everyone is just saying to you the things that they want you to hear. And it becomes such a suspicious society and culture that you have around you.

[18:58] Because you don't know who to trust. Because when people are complimenting you, you're like, that's just flattery. But then you end up just thinking nothing of yourself as well. There's just this dangerous place to be in. And Paul's saying, I didn't come with any flattering words.

I came here to come and tell you the truth. And then he's talking about his methods. So his motive was, hey, I came here because I was sent by God and I was approved by God. But hey, do you remember?

Verse 9. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. He's saying, you remember who I was. You remember what I did. I don't want you guys to feel as though I was living off your back.

So me, Silas, and Timothy, we were working. Day and night. We weren't trying to leech off you in any way. You were with us and you saw us.

And this ties in with what I said last week. I've always prayed, may my living always outrun my preaching. May my preaching never outrun my living. However good I become one day talking, may my living always be better.

[20:03] That's the goal that we have. Because society has something else that happens, which is this. We promote someone into a place because of their gifting. And the quote is, hey, never let your gifting take you to a place where your character can't keep you.

Never let your gifting take you to a place where your character can't keep you. And I think this is another challenge that our society faces. People who are very gifted in something, now with social media, it's all expedited.

And you can be kind of good at something. You add a filter onto it. And suddenly you become really good at something. And you have not earned it. The kids aren't here, so maybe it's safe to share this story.

As a basketball fan, as you know, I watch a lot of basketball. And there's been a recent trend that I found that has been super interesting, which is the celebrations have started to get pretty, what's the word?

Obnoxious, I guess, could be the word. When someone scores a basket, they do things, they do night-night, which is, I put you to sleep, so go away. Is that what he does?

[21:02] He does. He does. Johnny's like, this guy, convict this guy, Holy Spirit. So, and of course, my dear son, 11, turning 12, he's playing basketball. He's doing all these things. And he's doing this.

And he's doing the ice in my veins. And he's doing all these things. And I'm like, man, I didn't grow up in that era. When I missed five shots in a row, I'll be like, oh, I shouldn't shoot again. If I shoot again, I'm going to get in trouble.

But the next generation have this thing, which is, I'm just going to keep shooting. I can miss 10, and I'll hit one, and then I'll do a crazy celebration. And I'm like, sit yourself down. And of course, Steph Curry is a famous basketball player who's famous for his now night-night thing that we all saw in Paris.

But what we don't see, his gifting took him to a place. But his character allows him to stay there, because how did he even get there? There's these stories of how he trains, how he's the hardest person.

He's the first person in the gym, the last person out. Where other NBA players train with him, and they get so tired, they throw up. That's the level of intensity someone like him has to get to where he has, so that at one point, in one isolated incident, in one season, he'll do the celebration.

[22:10] But we adopt that, and then we do it everywhere, and we've not actually even earned it. And so what Paul is saying here, you remember what I was like. You know, you saw me work hard.

I wasn't just a flash in the pan. You weren't just following me on social media. We lived together. You saw how I did life. I'm at a stage in my life now, by God's grace, where maybe some of the biggest sins of years past have now gone, by God's grace.

So I'm fairly comfortable, if you were to walk into my life, if you were to walk into my house, if you were to take my phone and unlock my phone, there would be nothing that you would find that would be untoward or make you feel uncomfortable.

And by God's grace, that's where I'm at. But as we become leaders, the goal is not just to stay there where, hey, I'm avoiding some of the biggest sins. As I become a leader, as I grow as a leader, my prayer is this.

Jesus, can I be more and more like you? So it's not those so-called big sins, the usual sins that people are looking for anymore. Now it's me looking at myself going, why did you respond like that in a meeting?

[23:17] It's that someone said something, and you took it personally, but it wasn't even personal. So it's got to that stage for me, and I'm like, God, keep molding me. Keep working me. I'm still falling short of that.

And as I watch all these leaders from afar, and actually something that Aaron and I discussed at length about as this, which is actually those leaders, whether in the church or outside of the church, they don't set off to aim there.

You don't start a church and go, hey, I'm going to start this church. It's going to be supremely successful, and I'm going to go out with a bang in 20 years' time, and they're going to find out about how I use my money for that church, for my personal gain, and that's how I'm going to leave.

No one starts that way, but somehow we end up there. Somehow they end up there. And as I've shared with you, as a young leader, as a young minister, that's the thing that I'm guarding myself the most with.

And this is where I actually, I don't want to just talk myself, because when we're talking about this, the word we're really talking about is accountability. So the question I have for you is this.

[24:17] Wherever you are, and actually even if you do have some of the big sins in your life that you're like, oh, I still can't shake it. It's still there. No one can check my phone. I want to tell you there's grace.

There's grace. There's a place where you can actually, and I pray that you will have a community, have a people around you, who even if they were to know about these things, they would just show you love. They would just show you grace. That they won't condemn you, but they will call you higher.

And I wanted to share today, and I want to actually invite some of my friends up, who actually I've felt very, very grateful for. And it's what we call in the form of an accountability group.

And as I bring them up, I want to ask you to reflect, well, who are your people? If you are going down a route that's not good for you, that's not healthy for you, who's going to pluck you out and go, hey, I see where you're going.

We've been here. Snap out of it. Whatever it might be. Do you have those people? And so for me, I'm really excited to introduce, none of these are new people, so I'd love to invite Alex, Sam, and Aaron to come up.

[25:20] Can we grab those stools, please? Now, again, this is a little bit awkward. So some of you are going to see backs to some people. So it's just going to be completely based on luck, whether you draw this short straw and which good-looking man you get to see.

Actually, my brother would have been part of this, but he's helping out with kids. Can I grab one more stool? Or I guess I can just stand. That's okay, too. I wanted to bring these people up.

One, because I know that you get sick of hearing my voice. That's one thing. And two, it's very hard for me to talk about me as a leader and as talking about accountability and just doing it by myself.

Why don't I just bring the guys that I do life with to talk about it together? Again, so usually we're at five. We actually only met on Friday. And we go through a set of questions, seven questions, in fact, that talk about the different things that really just tackle the heart.

Have you spent time with the Lord? Are you using your money wisely? Have you been exposed to inappropriate encounters or explicit content? We talk about those things. And have we invested in our wives and our kids properly?

[26:30] And so we go through these questions and we answer them. And then at the very end, we ask, have you lied about any of the above? Because just to give you a final chance before you're condemned. And honestly, sometimes it's awkward.

It's like, here we go again. And sometimes someone just has something to say, you know what, like, what am I here for if I'm not going to tell the truth? And we know we need each other, that we are formed through relationship.

So maybe just to start off. And again, I've had the pleasure of just getting to know these people.

And some questions I briefed them about, but there's one or two that actually I'm going to just throw at them as a curveball just to see what their response is.

And just so you know that it's not crafted either way anyway. But Aaron, you and I have talked actually a lot about, I mean, you were a pastor as well, and of course you're from the West.

I'll help you out and say you're not from the US of A, you're from Canada. But of course, so you're friendly and kind and nice. Sorry, sorry.

[27:31] You say sorry all the time. And we've processed this. When you look at church leadership and you watch how they're just falling like flies, what goes through your mind? I think one you mentioned is that they don't start out that way.

Like it's not their heart or their desire that they want to fall. And so then the question comes to mind is sort of when does it start? And I think the majority of those who it's become public, it's actually been like a 20, 30, 40 year journey.

It's not even like it happened once in the last year. Or it's actually been a pattern in their life that has happened for a long time. And so then I ask myself if it's been a pattern in their life for so long, they must not have had people around them who they were talking to, who they were being open with, who they were allowing to ask the hard questions and being honest with themselves with.

And so I think it actually starts a long time before they become well known. And then when you become well known, it becomes all about you and maybe not about God in a lot of ways anymore.

And then it's hard to be open with others. And there's this completely terrible mindset that people have when, let's say, let's stay on church leadership for now, where someone starts something,

someone leads something, and then they're lifted up onto a pedestal and everything seems to be about them.

[28:53] And so they get lifted up. And then, of course, all the attention, all the positive flattery that people get. And then, of course, the moment they fall, we all kind of turn and point our fingers to them as well.

It goes, ah, I knew it all along and those kind of things. Honestly, as a leader yourself and as you're observing these and seeing these, what goes through your mind when it comes to actually how a church should even relate to or even follow a leader?

I think maybe just adding on to what Aaron was sharing about how kind of leaders kind of build this platform and then kind of be uplifted. I think maybe just a bit of context.

Yes, I am from the great United States of America and the land of mega churches, a.k.a. Texas. We forgive you. So I'm very familiar with kind of the American church landscape.

And, I mean, honestly, when you talk about kind of these leaders rising and falling, I think for me, like, I'm honestly, like, not surprised anymore. I would say probably, like, a big part of my faith journey in the last four years has probably just been learning how to grapple with the disappointment in the American church.

[30:01] And I hope you hear that from a place of because I love the church, which is why I'm so disappointed in the church. And I'll kind of get to how that relates to what Aaron was sharing. But I think especially in the last four years, there are definitely people, I mean, I know it happens everywhere in the world, but especially in America, people who are on the margins, you know, in a very, you know, COVID was hard.

There were a lot of racial and justice and equity issues at the time in the U.S. And I think the church's response was to kind of turn a blind eye to that. They instead were like, you know, we're going to keep doing our programs.

We're going to keep building up our institution. And by institution, I mean, you know, like the church being kind of like an organization. Their heart was more for that rather than actually being the church and, you know, going outside the four walls, loving people who are different than them, whether in race or socioeconomic status.

And I think a large part of that is actually what has also kind of platformed, you know, certain leaders further, because a lot of leaders, they probably didn't try to, like, you know, build their own little kind of step stool upwards.

It probably happened through the ground underneath them being kind of their church institution growing and ballooning in a way so much that it was no longer about, you know, what God's heart and mission was.

[31:14] And I think as a result, as you know, the pastor's seat usually got a lot larger, a lot higher as a result of that. So that's kind of been my experience. And as we were even talking about this on Friday, one of the things that you said was, actually, I don't know how much people care about the American church or the Western church here in Hong Kong.

And I was like, yeah, maybe they don't, maybe they're not critiquing the leadership and the scandals in quite the same way, or maybe it's just too far away. But it brought me to another thought. But I think sometimes maybe over here in the Eastern culture, there is so much reverence and so much deference and so much submission to the pastor that actually it's the other way that I want to address.

Hey, don't just look at me. Don't just follow me blindly. Actually, there's only one person you should follow, and it's not me. Right. And actually, just to challenge even actually what our perception or what our approach to following church leadership is and who is the leader that we're following, I think is something that's worth bringing up, right?

And just to add to that point, that's a really good point. And James knows this because I've shared this very bluntly and directly with him, which is I don't come to the church or I lead in the church because of James. Like James and his wife, they married us.

They've walked with us. We love them to death. But I've told him explicitly I'm here to know Jesus more, like whether it's at another church or elsewhere. I know James will be happy for me. So, yeah, I would encourage everyone the same.

[32:29] Like if there's any sort of blind spots in terms of, oh, I just go to the church because I love the preaching and I love the worship, maybe to just test your heart in terms of, you know, are there certain parts of the institution that you've prioritized over God?

Yeah. Sam, what thoughts do you have? Yeah. I'm not American. I do pay attention to what's going on with America.

So as James was mentioning and I saw nods going on, like I'm one of the nods. I recognize those people. And I think, you know, all the music that we sing, a lot of it comes out of the megachurches of the U.S.

So, you know, like we do need to test, put the test and use discernment, right? And so as we, you know, we sing the music and we trace it back to its source, it's important for us to kind of keep our thumb on what's going on.

And just a pattern I recognize in a lot of megachurches is there's no accountability for the pastor. Oftentimes, there might not be an elder board.

[33 : 35] It's a group of advisors to that pastor made up of other megachurch pastors, right? And so in a recent megachurch failure in the U.S., just someone else from another megachurch was just brought in to stand in for the pastor.

So there's just really no local community and accountability for those pastors. And maybe just another note, yeah, just hearing that the charisma of the person often outpaces the character. And really, that is an issue, right? God gives us gifts. But the refining, the seasons of being tested, sometimes they miss out on that entirely because they just get platformed.

Yeah, some thoughts that came to my head. Yeah. No, thank you. And so we have an accountability group, the Fivers, and we seek to meet regularly to ask these questions. This is where I'm going to put them on the spot.

I wrestled with even asking them this question because I also don't want to make it about me.

That's the last thing I want. I was like, oh, let's just have them all share what they think is bad about me. But then you're not here for that. But what I wanted to ask them, actually, is maybe you don't all need to rush and point out all my weaknesses.

[34 : 44] But when we're meeting as a group or maybe when you're hearing me speak as a leader here, what are you looking out for? Well, what are the things that you know that I'm most prone to that you're most sensitive to?

You're like, OK, I need to hold James to that because I know that's his weak spot. And I'm going to kind of keep propping up in there. I mean, Alex, you're nodding. So maybe you have something very sharp to say.

I'm nodding and just notice the direction of my eyesight right now. It's usually about how James spends his money is usually the question I ask him. Maybe just give some insight into our accountability group.

One of the questions is, have I honored God with my money this week? And James said something interesting this week, which was, I think, I hope you don't mind me sharing. You know, I think I have. Like, you know, I think I didn't cross the border.

I'm like, well, what's the border? Or, you know, do you and it's asking real questions where it's like, well, do you budget? You know, I asked that from a place of admittedly me and my wife do not budget. But all the other guys, Sam, Joe and Aaron, all their families do budget.

[35 : 46] So there is like this aspect of knowing that's kind of James is quote unquote like weak spot. But knowing there's brothers who have strength in that area and we can glean from it. I think maybe for me it's not a weak spot, but it's more of like, oh, I don't I haven't focused on strengthening that muscle enough.

So I really appreciate hearing from Aaron, from Sam, from Joe about how they they budget. Sam has a freaking spreadsheet where he literally he puts in every single transaction that he makes every month.

So I just love like learning from these brothers. And I hope, yeah, I'm sure it's a benefit to you as well. For sure. I mean, my love for shoes and Jordan's is well documented and has been has been a stronghold in my life for for many years since I worked at Fort Locker when I was a teenager. Terrible, terrible habits that were built there. I basically didn't need a paycheck. They just kept giving me shoes. But it's something. And so when I'm like and I'll tell you something this and I'm all about just sharing here.

When I get stressed, when I'm like, oh, just flustered or tired. Like I'm on Amazon. Like I'm just like, what do I need to buy? Well, like what kind of new charger do I need to buy?

[36 : 52] But maybe it's like a four in one that I can kind of charge all my devices in one. Like and then it'll come and the Amazon package will come. And my wife is like, what is that? And it's just a

USB C one, two, three thing.

And it's amazing. So that's something. But I have this. I'm like, OK, I know. I know they're going to be asking me this question. So I need to be able to actually put my hand on my heart and go, hey, what is this?

Aaron, I know that you Aaron is a super caring kind of person. And what are you looking out for as we even as you're talking to me, as you're asking questions? What are some of the things that you're looking out for? Yeah, I think I was.

I think there's a couple of things. I think the caring one is a big one. I think I'm also a little bit unique in where we work together. So you're my boss and my pastor and friend.

And so I think I see you in many aspects of life. And so I think even in the way. Yeah, I think personal relationship.

[37 : 54] I think leading those that are harder to lead. And not. Yeah, leading those who are harder to lead and having patience and grace and being willing to walk with them and help them grow in their journey.

And not. Yeah. And having patience for that. I think I don't have patience for that personally.

Sometimes I just want to keep going. But I also know we're all on growth journeys.

And so I think the caring side and the patient side. And then our kids are the same age. And so I think family side, especially just for us, seeing how we walk with our kids through puberty and growth and bullying and like kids caring for each other and stuff like that.

Having that is important. He's so caring. And something that I've always said and I've actually learned to reflect over in my conversations with these men is actually I'll know the state of my own soul in how I respond to criticism and compliments.

Like either of those will expose me to my heart going, oh, wow, you really soaked in that compliment right there. Like, oh, that complaint crushed you to a point where it should not have crushed you.

[39 : 16] And I'll be like, and that's when these men around me are like, oh, yeah, that shouldn't have crushed you. You're being a jerk. You're not being patient enough and those kind of things. So it's having this kind of setup is helpful for me. Final question.

Final thought, Sam. I think my mind just goes back to I don't know how long ago, but I think before the accountability group, I think I had asked you like what accountability for you look like and what what support look like for you.

And so I think at that time, maybe that wasn't built in a very disciplined way of meeting with some other guys.

But but yeah, I think I think that's that's what I just cared about in general. But yeah, like Alex notices the desire for comfort and that's the word comfort is something you've used, I think, many times.

And I think we're all susceptible to that. But as you say, it's important that we are able not to just just, you know, slap you on the back and say, like, oh, you're doing great. But actually just be happy to have the the equity to be able to call you out really relational equity to call you out and say, hey, yeah, let's let's talk about this.

[40 : 29] Appreciate you. And again, absolutely enough about me. Hear me loud and clear. This is not about me. This is about all of us. Do we and all of us are in different leadership roles in some way. The question is, do you have accountability?

Do you have people who will ask you, hey, your motives, your heart, your methods, where are you at? Because I think it's so important. I think that's how we grow. That's that's the iron sharpening iron part. So thank you.

Thank you, Manfa, just even just coming up and being willing to share about that. So I appreciate you. Can we give them a round of applause? We need people.

I need people. You need people. People. Introverts need people. Perfect people. You don't exist, but you need people, too. The question is, do you have those kinds of people around you who actually, if they were to.

Do you have anyone to go, hey, you remember when we were together and we lived life and did this? I think it's so important. And this isn't just to bring out judgment and it isn't to bring out shame, but it is to have that accountability because we know that's how we grow.

[41:33] Growth is formed through relationship. You can't grow on your own, unfortunately. That is the key. And it's hard. It is so hard because we're not just battling against ourselves.

I need you to hear this. Your battle that you're facing, yes, is your flesh and your sin and your selfishness. But there is also another power at play, which makes it super hard.

And it says about Ephesians 6 that it's actually we're not battling against flesh and blood only.

There is something even more. And you see here in chapter 2 towards the end here, Paul's like, I've just wanted to come back to you.

I really, really have. I've just wanted to spend time with you. But, and he says it just almost so casually, verse 18, because he wanted to come to you, I, Paul, again and again. I wanted to come to you. But Satan hindered us.

But Satan hindered us. There is an enemy at play here. So when you are alone and when you are fighting some of those temptations, beware that it's not just you fighting against yourself, but there is something else.

[42:31] There is a power that is happening. Ephesians 2 talks about the prince of the power of the air. 2 Corinthians 4, 4 talks about the God of this world. Right now we live in a place where the enemy has influence over us and tries to deceive us.

The question is, are you God? And that's why we need people around us. My dad used to say, and he quoted Richard Branson, who I think quoted someone else, which is, you don't know what you don't know. And it's by definition, you don't know when you're being deceived.

Otherwise you wouldn't be deceived. And so you need people around you who can see your blind spots, who, when you share something with them, you're like, oh, no, no, no, no. That's not exactly what happens. But we, you and I both know, we can get into those places where we look at a circumstance, look at a person, look at a conversation and go, and you twist it to your own narrative.

So having people around you just to shine a light, a different light, a different perspective onto what you're facing is so important. Because we're not just battling against ourselves or each other.

There is an enemy at play here who is trying to deceive us. So then what hope do we have? And what hope do we have here? Even though there is a prince of the power of the air, even though there is this God, this small g, this small g of this world.

[43:42] The goal is that we remember that, but the victory isn't his. We may be battling against him, but he's already been defeated. And it says here, at the very last verse, for what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus that is coming.

That crown is a wreath from the Greek culture where the race has been won or the Olympics when you see the wreath placed, the crown placed above someone who has won the race.

And so we face this enemy. We face the devil himself, knowing that the battle has already been won. So next time you are alone and you have something going on inside you that, oh man, an imposter syndrome takes over and you're sitting like, you shouldn't be a leader.

You shouldn't be this. Then catch it and go, enemy, you have no place here. Flee. Get behind me. No weapon formed against me will prosper.

And you say, this battle has already been won. And yes, you're right. I am weak. And what I should do, I don't do. And what I shouldn't do, I do do. What a wretched man I am. But praise be to God, the Jesus who saves, the Lord Jesus who saves us from our sin.

[44:53] And so the battle is already won. So we can claim victory even in this moment when we're still fighting that battle. And that's the goal that we have. That's the prayer that we have as believers that we would get to this place where we understand that we have that crown.

But maybe final thought here is let's not take that crown lightly. That crown came because he also bore a crown of thorns. That he died for our sin.

That sin that you're struggling with right now, Jesus knew about and took it to the cross and paid for that price right there. And that crown of thorns he then swapped for a crown of victory.

The one that you have as well now. And so let's get together. Find the people around you. My prayer is that if you finish this time with us here and you reach out to your one, two, three friends. It can't be. Honestly, Hong Kong life and travel and schedules. To even try and get more than three, four people together is hard. But that's all you need. Two, three, four people go, hey, I need this.

[46:02] Not because there's any deep dark sin in my life. Or maybe there is and that's okay as well. But I need this because I need people around to support me, to encourage me, and to hold me

accountable.

And to keep my eyes pointing, pointing back to the Lord. And that's what we're here for. I want to spend some time now for us to just respond to that.

And maybe some will lead us in some music with Florence. But I want to ask you that question.

Maybe I'll lead us in a prayer now. So I invite you just to bow your head and close your eyes.

And maybe even if you're comfortable, to open up your hands. Just as a sign of openness. The truth is there are some of us here who do have closets that are filled with skeletons.

But if someone here trawled through your phone, you'd be so ashamed. Or if they came home and saw how you lived, they would be so disgusted.

[47:11] I just want to pull you from that mindset. Because Jesus, by doing what he did, what he really is doing, he's come right up to you.

Where you are in your darkest place. Where you have committed the worst things that you have done. And maybe still with that crown of thorns on his head, he says, Don't worry.

I've dealt with it. For you. There's no need to be ashamed. Don't hold on to this darkness.

I'm the light of the world. Whoever follows me will walk in light and not darkness.

And he says to us, I'm gracious and compassionate. I'm not even angry. I have abounding love for you.

[48:46] I'm relenting from disaster and punishment. And so would you let him in? Even into that deepest, darkest room? Invite him in.

And my second thought is, once you've invited him in, would you also invite some friends in?

Friends who love you.

Despite your flaws. Friends who will challenge you when you need to. Can you ask the Holy Spirit now, who are those people?

And if you have names popping up in your mind, remember them. Reach out to them. Let us let him in.

Let us let them in. let them in. You're the only leader.

[50:08] You're the only one who is good. and so we follow you we imitate you we look to you, we trust you we worship you we love you in your name we pray Amen