

A Pastor's Final Plea

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[0:00] Because something that I've been reflecting on recently a lot of is leadership is hard. Can I just have a raise my hand? Who would consider themselves a leader here? In any context, just a leader.

! And then nod your head or cry if you agree with me that leadership is hard. Man, I used to be that young hotshot in the back of a... I was a teacher when I was in England. I used to just be that young teacher sat at the back of the classroom in the staff meetings, watching NBA highlights, and just thinking, I could do a better job. That was always what I would think.

But then you get to the place where you're like, oh, actually, you have to be the leader. Leadership is hard. Whether you're leading a life group, whether you're leading a family, you have to lead when other people aren't feeling it, you have to be there. When other people are late, you have to really be there on time.

You have to be the one that is consistent. You have to be the one that shows up consistently every time. And of course, the extra special pie is people look at you as a leader and they go, well, you're not doing that right.

Or you're not doing that right. Or I would do this if I was you as a leader. I would be more free and I would let you do this. Or I would do this. And then before, you know, you've got all these other people who are looking at you going, well, they can do a better job than you.

[1:17] Leadership is hard. And it's not for everyone. Yet in Scripture, in 1 Timothy 3, Paul talks about, hey, actually, it is good, it is noble to aspire to be a leader. With that said, you're also going to be measured by a different measuring stick.

The office of a leader is hard. The responsibility of a leader is hard. My favorite quotes that I've shared before, leadership is welcoming people on a suboptimal journey.

It's recognizing that we have limited resources. We have limited time. We have limited people. We have limited anything. And so you need leaders who can then discern and be wise and go, well, where do we go?

What do we do? How do we do it? Leadership is disappointing people at a rate that they can absorb because of those limited resources. So someone is going to be unhappy. So then you have to decide, well, who's going to be the least unhappy?

Or rather, can we make the tough decisions for those people to grow? Maybe it's during COVID, especially during COVID, when we were all looking at the leaders of the world and going, you're a terrible leader.

[2:20] You are a terrible leader. You're making the wrong decisions, right? We were in there. There was a snapshot in time where I looked across the world leaders. And I was like, oh, Lord Jesus, it's time to pull the plug on humanity and come back.

We're done here. Because leadership is hard, but yet we also see lots of people who crave leadership, who crave power. Why? Because it's for selfish reasons.

There's a bishop from Ghana who said this, it is so disheartening that leadership now is about selfishness and greed. So it is unfortunate that service and servants are missing from the church now because the world does not see leadership as a service, but as a status to be served.

We see leaders who have charisma, but without character, it leads to catastrophe, is what someone else says. Leaders with charisma, but without character, leads to catastrophe.

They may have the gifting to take us there, but they don't have the character to stay there.

Leadership is hard. Simon Sinek, one of my favorite people to listen to, to talk about this, he coined the phrase leaders eat last.

[3:33] And he said this, leadership has nothing to do with rank. Leadership is a choice, a choice to look after the person to the left of you and look after the person to the right of you. If you commit every single day to helping them succeed, you become a leader.

Leaders are the ones willing to look out for those who need help. When it matters, leaders choose to eat last. Leaders.

Leadership is hard. Not a quote by him, but I think I first heard it from the 90s Chicago Bulls basketball coach who said, you are only as strong as the weakest link.

I would maybe actually twist that a little bit and go, I think you're only as strong as your leaders. The leaders who choose this job, knowing that it's hard, who know that they will disappoint people, who know they will be stabbed behind the back, and yet they will still choose to do it, because it's what Christ did for them.

Especially in the church. I'm going to ask you now, just to throw it out there, maybe just in society, in history, who are some leaders that you look up to and go, oh, that's a good leader? Any thoughts come to mind?

[4:39] Any examples of good leaders that you've observed up close or from afar? Any? Jackie, you're nodding. What have you got? Good leader?

Any leaders that you can think of? Yep. Wealthy people who actually automatically resume places of leadership because of their wealth, but they maybe not even should be there.

But of course, there are those who genuinely should. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. So leaders who have a lot, and yet they also choose to give a lot. Those kind of leaders. We all aspire. We all are blessed by those kind of leaders. What other kind of leaders come to mind, Queenie?

Any leader that comes to mind? Yep. Yep. Yep.

[5:46] Wang Yanlong. See, and I feel as though, I'm guessing you actually know him personally. Because that's something else that they say, right? Never meet your heroes. Never meet those leaders. Because when you pull back the curtain and you see that they're actually real human beings with real struggles and real flaws, that's when the problem comes.

From afar, I think I've quite admired, again, I'm a basketball fan. I quite admire the NBA commissioner, Adam Silver. I feel as though the way he holds himself, the way he makes decisions and articulates what he's trying to do.

Again, he always makes decisions that not everyone is happy with. But I feel as though that's maybe a trait of a good leader. So I'm tempted to ask people for examples of bad leaders. But I feel as though that would just be a can of worms.

Because something else happens when it comes to leadership is that, no doubt, all of you have experienced some sort of bad leadership in some ways. Some of you are just looking at me and going, yeah, right now. And sadly, you've also been burnt by bad leadership.

Leaders who haven't had the courage to make decisions that you think are right. Leaders who have looked after themselves. And of course, the hard part comes when we become a leader and we realize, oh, we are that person.

[6:52] We are that person that has been looking out for ourselves, who is worried about how other people perceive us. Leaders are humans. And what we're looking at today is a passage of scripture in Acts 20.

So I'd encourage you to turn there now before I invite you to stand. So we were in Ephesus last week. Remember the guys that tried to cast out the demon? And then end up getting into a fight and then looting all their clothes.

That group. And there was a riot that happened. Chapter 20, then he starts to go into different, he leaves Ephesus and then he goes to Macedonia and to Greece. We won't really touch on that a little, that much today.

And there's this hilarious passage of this young man called Eutychus who is listening to a sermon. And the sermon gets really long. And then he falls asleep.

I mean, if all of us had those moments where people would see we were in sermons and we fell asleep, that would really be quite embarrassing, right, Caleb? Like, just really embarrassing.

[7:49] But he was tired that day. But thankfully, I'm not going to speak as long as Paul. And Caleb is a bit more mature and older than Eutychus was.

He was probably just a teenager at the time. But then he falls from the third floor and then they take him for dead. And they're like, what? He died. But then actually, he ends up, well, a miracle happens and Paul actually ends up reviving him.

And so from that moment on, Eutychus does not fall asleep in a sermon ever again. Or just sit by the window. Don't worry, you're safe, Caleb. You just stay as far from the window as possible. And then we meet this passage here that I think is probably my favorite passage on leadership.

Paul offers a leadership blueprint to his leaders in the church in Ephesus. Remember, the church that he just started one chapter ago. The church that he spent two, three years with.

So imagine this. It's about this size of group, mate. Well, actually, the church was maybe this size, but then the leaders were a smaller group. But around two, three years, Paul spent with this group. And then something happens.

[8:56] And this is where we're going to move into Acts chapter 20, verse 17 to 38. I believe we have some special readers. Jojo, have we got scripture reading? Who have we got? Ava and JJ.

Can you give a round of applause to Ava and JJ? And can I invite us all to stand for the word of the Lord? So you're going to do 17 to maybe there.

25 and then we'll do the rest. Now from Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

And when they came to him, he said to them, you yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews.

How I did not shrink from declaring you anything that was profitable and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[10:06] And now behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself. If only I may finish my course on the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

And now behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. To care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.

[11:15] Therefore, be alert, remembering that that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

I coveted no one silver, gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands minister to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things, I have shown you that by working hard in this way, we must speak.

We must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus. How he himself said, it is more blessed to give than to receive. And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

And there was much weeping on the part of all. They embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken. That they would not see his face again. That they accompanied him to the ship. This is the word of the Lord. Please take a seat. Thank you, guys. So the context.

[12:24] Paul is reaching the end of his life. And if you just peek into scripture, you'll see we're at chapter 20. We've only got a few more chapters left. He's approaching the end of his life. And actually, when you want to see what's most important to that person, you hear their last words.

That is probably going to be giving you a good clue. And so he gathers the leaders in Ephesus. But he doesn't have time to go to them again. So he asks them to come over to him. And so he gathers them together.

And it's an emotional time. And it's an intense time. And he goes through this. Basically, I think what he does is he tells them. He reminds them what kind of leader he used to be to them. He tells them what kind of leader he is right now.

And then he tells them what kind of leaders they should be as they go. Why? Because they're not going to see him again. I mean, just imagine this for a second here. We've been together for three years or so. And then I say that today, guys, this is my last time speaking to you.

Remember what I've got to say. Because next week, I'll be gone. Next week, I'm going to be going to Turkey and getting some hair transplants. And you won't ever see me again in the same way.

[13:27] And I may not make it back, guys. So remember my last words. That's the place that we're in. Not exactly, but I'm hoping to be here next week.

Still with the same hairstyle. Now, so, and he sits there and then he goes, this is, and this is where he starts. And he, first of all, he reminds them of who he was. And so he says this, you yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia.

He says, you know what kind of leader I've been. Why? Because you've seen me up close. You have known me personally, not just as a hero from afar, but you have seen the way I live.

That's huge, even right there. You see, it's interesting. In 1 Timothy 3, you'll see this jobster description, this CV of what a leader should be. And he writes about that. And that's a good, basically, I think a good baseline of what a leader is for Paul.

But then what you see here is actually even more important. It's actually who he was. So he actually lived this out. How many of us have actually seen leaders who say one thing and then do another thing? So this is where he goes, no, you yourself know how I have lived among you.

[14:41] Our life group on Monday, I shared with them one of my favorite passages on discipleship is 2 Timothy 3, where Paul talks to Timothy and says, hey, you have seen my teaching, but you've also seen my conduct, my life, my aim in life, how I suffered in life.

You've seen how I live. This is a leader who says, you have seen every part of how I do my ministry and how I do my life. And you yourselves know how I lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews.

You'll know what kind of leader you're dealing with when you see them go through tough times.

When the going gets tough, then you'll see what their true colors are. How they deal with disappointments, how they deal with frustrations, how they deal with death.

You'll get to see a little bit of what is going on in that leader. And Paul is essentially saying the same thing here. And then he carries on. And how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable and teaching you in public from house to house.

So what we see here, first of all, is a leader who is invested. Someone who's looking at you and go, I know you. I have been with you. I have spent time with you. The organization I was with for these last five years is called Young Life that really works with young people.

[15:59] And the motto always is, earn the right to be heard. Go to where the young people are and earn the right to be heard. You have no right to tell them how to live their lives unless you have earned the right to be heard. What does that mean? That you have spent time with them, that you have invested in them.

And when you have that right, then you can speak into that life. In England, in our home, we used to love inviting people over to spend time in our home. To actually live with us.

And we had spare rooms so we could do that in England. And they would read stories with our kids. It's those disciples, it's those people that we spent time with, that we actually then felt as though we could earn the right to be heard, to actually speak into their lives.

We had a rule, just an unwritten rule, which is, actually, unless that person has stayed in our house, we won't speak words of rebuke over them. Because we want to feel as though we have invested and earned the right to be heard.

And so that's what Paul is saying here. He's doing the same thing. So he's invested in these people. Well, later in verse 31, he says this, I admonished you, which is I rebuked you, I told you off, but I did it with tears. And I did it day and night for three years.

[17:00] What does that mean? It means I'm disciplining you, but it's out of just this heartbreak. It's out of this love that I have for you. I'm not there to provoke you. I'm there to love you.

And I admonish you with tears because my heart breaks as you make those choices. Parenting is also hard because parenting is also leadership. And I had someone give me an example that they

said with their children, which is, hey, look at this glass.

Just a glass of wine. Just a glass. And he says, and he told his kids, actually, my heart as your father is like this glass. You hold this glass.

You hold my heart. When you make a decision that hurts yourself or hurts me or hurts others, you drop it and it smashes and it hurts. Often we don't appreciate that as we're looking at the leaders that we have.

Maybe some of us haven't experienced leaders that have invested in us. But this idea of a leader that admonishes his people with tears day and night for three years, whose heart breaks when he watches the people that he leads or she leads make decisions that are destructive to them.

[18:12] And so this leader is invested. But what else is about this leader? Verse 20, and how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable. This leader tells the truth.

Leadership is hard because you have to look at someone and go, I love you, but actually, I need to tell you the truth. That's hard. How many of us have felt as though we're supposed to confront someone, but we're like, you know what, that's just too hard.

Having those conversations is hard unless you're at Enneagram 8 and you like to challenge, and then it gets a little bit easier. But for a lot of people, that's just hard to actually go to someone and go, I see that in you, and I think I want to call you higher, and I want to tell you that that is wrong. But not just to do it, just for the sake of it, but for declaring to you anything that was profitable to build you up and not to tear you down. We've all probably been recipients of leaders who have spoken down to us to tear us down.

And yet here we have a leader who admonishes with tears to raise you up. That kind of leader is hard. And then it carries on. This leader is not only invested, not only willing to tell the truth.

[19:18] Now, we have a lot of things that as Christians, as followers of Christ in this society, that we have to speak truth into. But of course, you do it with love. But he also does it with integrity.

integrity. What does that word mean? That he's just the same everywhere. What does he say here? And teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks. What he's saying, whether we were at church, or whether we were at home, or whether we were out on the sports field, whether it's to you or to you, it doesn't matter, I've said the same thing.

Aren't we all hungry for leaders who are filled with integrity? People who you look at and you go, I know exactly what you're like wherever you are. That kind of people. Don't we yearn to be those kinds of people ourselves?

Isn't it amazing that Paul can say, after three years with these people, he says, hey, you know how I've lived, whether it's in the synagogue or whether it's at home, whether it's the Jews or the Greeks, I have done the same.

So my favorite chapter in the Bible is 1 Corinthians 9, where he talks about, to the Jews I'm a Jew, to the Greeks I'm a Greek, I become all things to all people in order to save some. And at the end of the chapter, he says, I discipline myself, my body, train it to do what it should, lest after preaching to others, I myself might be disqualified.

[20:26] So he's saying, I have paved the way. Leadership is hard, because when you don't want to do it, you still have to, for the sake of those who are following you. That's why it's hard.

That's why it's a noble task. So what we have here is an invested leader, a truth teller, who is consistent, and who is also persistent. He's just constantly just saying the same message to these people, repent.

And what is the message? Testifying both to Jews and to the Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus. He's saying the same message.

At home, at work, with his friends, repent. Turn around. Turn around and follow him. Follow Jesus. That's all he's asking. That was the leader that he was.

And so he's reminding them, hey guys, remember, you're about to never see me again, but remember what I was to you. Remember who I was. I think I am a recipient. I was blessed by having a father who was a man of integrity, who I got to see whether he was at church or whether he was at work or whether he was at home.

[21:31] On the most part, we felt he's the same person everywhere. There was never, never any doubt in us that, oh, he's going to show up there and suddenly he's going to do this. People of integrity. So needed as we look at the leaders in this world right now.

So he reminds them of the leader that he was and then he says, verse 22, and now behold, I am going to Jerusalem constrained by the spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

So he says, okay, let me tell you about who I am now. I am a leader that is constrained by the spirit. That's a really interesting term that he's saying. I can't help but follow God's lead. I can't help it. And I tell you where the Holy Spirit is telling me to go. He's telling me to go to Jerusalem. And actually, this will probably be my last trip because I also know on this trip is where I'm going to experience imprisonment and affliction.

A godly leader is one of integrity who's invested in people who tells the truth but someone who also follows the Holy Spirit. That is the kind of leader that I hope that you will look for. That is the kind of leader that I hope that you will also become.

[22:41] Someone who actually, you cut them open and what you see is someone who has a heart for God. You see Psalm 27 and you say, that's David's one thing. One thing he asks is that he will be with God.

As part of a leader of an organization, I often heard, especially a Christian one, I heard this term about, hey, actually, you need to have a vision. You need to have a vision in order for your organization to grow and succeed and be fruitful.

And the passage that was often used was Proverbs 29, 18. And it was often quoted to me as, hey, without vision, a people perish. Not if you've heard that before. Without vision, a people perish. And often it's been taken by organizations, Christian ones, well-meaning ones, to say, hey, you need to have a vision. If you don't have a vision, your organization is going to shrink and then close down. That's what people used it for.

But that's not the vision that it's talking about here. We've applied a worldly, corporate, strategic context into that passage when it says, without vision, a people perish. That vision is not a five-year strategic goal plan.

[23:40] In order to grow your business or grow your ministry. That's not the vision it's talking about. What he's saying here, without a prophetic vision, without sight of God, without the knowledge of God's word, people won't perish.

The word actually is people will lack restraint. If you don't hear from God, if you don't see and look for God, you will be all over the place is what it's saying. The leader that he is right now is constrained by the Spirit.

He says, I can't help but do the one thing that the Holy Spirit is telling me to do and that is to go to Jerusalem and that is to suffer for his name. Because in Acts 9, when he met me, when he blinded me, he says, you are going to be my chosen instrument and you are going to suffer for me.

So he knows that's what it is. Would we be the leaders that look to God and say, even if it's tough, I'm going to go there because you tell me to go there.

So he's that kind of leader. That is the one thing that he's asking for in verse 24. I don't account my life of any value nor as precious to myself if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I receive from the Lord Jesus does testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

[24:51] Reminds me of Philippians 1.10 where he says, to live or to die, it really doesn't matter. To live is Christ and to die is gain. Actually, I'd rather depart and be with Christ for that is far better but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.

I want to go there and I'll tell you as a leader right now, I would love to go there. If you gave me a choice right now, which way would you go? Would you rather stay or would you rather go? I would rather go. But to stay is more necessary on your account.

I've got something that I have to still give you, admonish you with tears, live with you, invest in you because it's for your good. That's what he's saying here and that's huge.

That I may finish my course and the ministry that I received. Wait, Paul, you are the greatest church planter that has ever lived. If you sat in front of donors, you would be able to deliver and share with them the KPIs and you will have been off the charts.

All the churches in the world started really from the movement that you started and yet he wouldn't say that. He would say, that's just the ministry that I received from the Lord. It wasn't what I started. It wasn't my dream.

[26:00] I'm not building my dream here. I'm not building my kingdom here. All I'm trying to do is that I would focus on God and the ministry that he gave me. Philippians 3 says, I press on toward the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

That's all I care about. I don't care about how big my church is growing. Man, I would love to be in that place where I'd say, I don't really care whether the gathering stays, grows, or shrinks and dies. It doesn't bother me because whatever it is, it's the ministry that the Lord gives to me. I'm receiving it and really, it's none of my business what he wants to do with it. I would love to be in that place yet every time I'm faced with an opportunity, I often wrestle and go, this is my project.

This is what I want to do to grow and that's where I go wrong and that's where I go wrong because this is a ministry that I receive from the Lord and I'm supposed to do my thing, focus on my race and guess what?

You're supposed to focus on yours. So the question I have for you is what ministry do you think you've received? Look, as a pastor of this church, I'm supposed to just look at you and go, hey, what's the ministry that you've received from the Lord?

[27:07] What are you supposed to do? Are you supposed to run an alpha? Then run an alpha. Then go for it. We're all on this journey together. Oh, you're supposed to lead the worship ministry? Lead the ministry.

Let me know how I can help support you. You feel compelled to go and do prison ministry? Well then go and do it. this isn't what I dictate and determine.

This is what you, now it's then your job to follow through. It's your job to actually live this life and to follow the call that God has on your life. That's what Paul is saying here.

And now behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom of God will see my face again. There I, for I testified to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

He's saying, I'm about to leave. I'm about to drop my mic and actually it's not my responsibility anymore. Why? Because I've already told you the truth. I've already told you who God is. I've already told you who Jesus is. I've already told you who the Holy Spirit is and what I'm doing to follow.

[28:07] I'm going to leave now. You have to follow him yourself. And it's not going to be on me that you're not following him. I've done everything that I can. Now it's your responsibility.

This is the part that sometimes I'm reminded of and I get riled up because so often I hear, of course, whether it's people in this church or whether it's people in other churches, oh, I'm just not growing anymore.

The pastor's not helping me anymore. And I'll be like, hey, well, pastors, leaders, can we do what we're supposed to do, which is not stringed from the truth, to teach them the whole counsel of God, to teach from this book and not just from our own wisdom.

But once we're done with that, it's your responsibility. Your growth is your responsibility. Florence's father is my dentist.

And so he's the only one in this world who makes me cry every time I see him. So he sees me at my lowest. That's why he doesn't come to this church anymore because he doesn't have respect for me. But I see him twice a year.

[29:12] How would it be if I complained about my teeth and saying, my teeth are your responsibility? No, it's not. I've been told. You've got to brush your teeth.

You've got to floss. You only need to floss the teeth that you want to keep, but floss. I can't go to my dentist and say, hey, my teeth aren't doing well. What are you doing about this?

No, no, no. It's each of our responsibility to run our race, to walk the walk that the Lord has placed in our lives. What we're supposed to do is simply follow the ministry that he's received, that we've received from him, and we'll do what we're supposed to do.

Don't shrink from the truth, tell it in love, and then just, that's it. And then we keep running our race. That's the goal that we should have here. That's what Paul is saying here. Now he turns.

He's saying, look, you know the leader I was, and you also know the leader I am right now and where I'm going and why I can't be with you forever, but now I'm turning to you. And then he says, pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

[30:17] He says, pay careful attention to yourself. And this goes back to the leader who is invested, this leader who is of integrity, who is honest, who is vulnerable. You yourselves have to be there now.

You have to look after yourself. How often, when we have leaders who maybe were elevated prematurely because of the wrong reasons and they are not people of integrity and they are not caring for their own souls, they are not modeling to the people that they're leading what a godly leader looks like and you watch the flock just suffer for it.

And he's saying, I'm leaving now. I'm gone. I'm innocent at this because I've done what I need to do. You now need to do what you need to do, which is this. I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you not sparing the flock.

Remember the magicians before? Remember those who gave up all their books, the 35,000 US dollars worth of books? All the false prophets, the sons of Sceva that were trying to just conjure up and invoke the name of Jesus?

Those people are going to be back. People like that are going to be back. They're going to come back into the church and they're going to try and lead you astray. And I'm going to be gone and I can't tell you, I can't protect you from them anymore.

[31:26] Leaders, can you protect your flock in the same way? Can you pay careful attention to what is the truth? Why? Not because you're nice people, but because Christ obtained it with his own blood.

If someone gave up their lives to give you something, you would look after that very well. You'd be like, oh, someone actually died for these people. As a leader, I'm reminded of that.

When I look and lead some of the people and it's hard, I look at you and I'm going, oh, but Christ died for you. Christ loved you. I'm still trying to learn how to love you, but Christ loved you enough to die for you. He obtained you with his own blood, so I'm here to try and care for you.

And they're going to come in, not sparing the flock, and this is where it gets really scary. Verse 30, and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them. Someone sat here today is going to say, a twisted thing to pull you away from being a disciple of Jesus.

Isn't that scary? Someone sat right next to you could be doing, me here and Melissa just had the hilarious look at each other, among us.

[32:44] And it's interesting because those people might not even be malicious. You're not trying to do it on purpose, but you yourself might be deceived. What's the definition of someone who's being deceived? It's like you don't know that you're being deceived.

You don't know that this is a wrong thought. And you're trying to share it with someone else. He's saying be careful. There are those. Let me stop here and ask a question.

What are the wolves coming to speak to the church in Hong Kong today? What are some of the things, what are some of the messages that the church is most in danger of that needs to protect and guard against? in a congregation like this?

What should we be guarding ourselves against? Shem, what thoughts do you have? Hmm?

Priorities. We can always do it tomorrow. Priorities. When someone goes, oh, I would love to do that. I would love to read the Bible, but I simply can't because A, B, C, D, E, F, G.

[33:47] Oh, I would love to join a community, but I can't because of this. Priorities. That's a huge one. And it almost sounds right.

It almost sounds, okay, well, understand, understand. I get it. I get it. Priorities. That's a huge one. Jasper, what can you think of? Division.

And if this starts a little bit with people going at the leaders and going, well, okay, well, I think you're making the wrong decision there. I think I know better. I think we should do this instead. And then it starts.

And then you've got these places where, okay, well, I think this and I think that. I prefer this and I prefer that. And so then we start to whisper and then we start to argue. There's another quote.

I don't know if I, I wrote this down. It's often when you look at any chaotic problem in your workplace, in your family, anywhere, in the church, any chaotic problem that you observe that has to do with humans, which is so many, is often, if you can root it all the way back, it's because of the lack of a good leader.

[34:54] Now, it doesn't mean that leader is perfect who knows what to do every single time, but so often the problems that we face are because we're not the leaders that we're supposed to be. division, priorities, busyness, all these things.

Working to earn your salvation. These are things that I think that maybe our church, that the church in Hong Kong, that the city of Hong Kong is probably the most in danger of. These are the things that we really must guard ourselves against.

So carry on. Verse 31. Therefore be alert, I haven't talked about this already, remembering that for three years I did not seize night or day to admonish every one of you with tears, everyone with tears.

Man, to have that leader who cares so much about you that when you're making a stupid decision that they break down in tears. They are sad for you. Praying.

Praying that we would be those kinds of leaders. Verse 32. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one silver or gold or apparel.

[35:56] You yourselves know that these hands minister to my necessities and to those who were with me. Not only was I invested just in you, I would also look after myself. I would pay my own ways what he's saying.

You saw how hard I worked. That I was a tent maker by day and then I was then going into the synagogue in the evenings and the weekends to minister to you and to your house. I was working, I was not lazy.

And you could see that, oh, to get to the end of your race with a certain group of people and for you to be able to say, I gave you my all. And you saw it. And there's no doubt in my mind.

Now you go and do the same. In all things, I have shown you that by working hard in this way, we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Now, those exact words, it is more blessed to give than receive, we don't actually see in scripture. But the book of John at the end also tells us that Jesus said so many other things that they couldn't write it all down. And so this could be one of them.

[36:54] And of course, it's consistent with what he said, which is what? Be generous. If you have lots of wealth, be generous. If you have very little wealth, be generous. To be people who give, not just money, but time.

Not just time, but care. Not just care, but actually make effort to pay attention to the people. That's what he's saying.

Be generous. And then I can just imagine this emotional scene already, verse 36, and when he has said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all and there was much weeping on the part of all. They embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken that they would not see his face again and they accompanied him to the ship.

They say goodbye. They leave. And they're in tears. Oh, to be in a place. Now, none of us are ever going to stay in the setups that we have right now with the friends that we have right now forever.

I mean, the most morbid thought is that everyone we know around us will die, whether it's us first or them firsts. But to be in a place where you've invested in each other so when you leave, you know, I have given everything to this group of people.

[38:02] That's the prayer that I have for me. It's the prayer that I also hope that you have for your life group, for your workplace. That you can leave and go, I have given everything to you.

Why? To what? Not just to make you a better person to like me more, but that you would then be closer to the Lord Jesus. You would look more like Jesus in all of that. What you see from Paul, and this is where I'm getting close to finishing, in 1 Corinthians 11, 1, he says this, imitate me as I imitate Christ.

He earned the right to say that because they saw how he lived and he says, now you've seen how I've done it, now you do it. You've seen how I copied Christ, now you copy me and that's discipleship and that's what it is.

If you just scan back through this passage and I haven't really focused on it but I will now because really it's the center of everything. Verse 21 says, this testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 24, if only I may finish my course in the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus. and then later, imitate, remember these words by the Lord Jesus.

[39:15] This is a leader that's not trying to build his own profile, his own campaign. This is a leader that actually everything is centered around the Lord Jesus. Reminds me of the words of John the Baptist in John 3 when he says, he must increase, I must decrease.

I'm outrageous, guys. I live in the wilderness. I dress funny. I shout but it's not about me. It's about him. Can we be leaders that ultimately point people to Jesus and that is it?

I'm reminded of Jesus' last words. We've just been looking at Paul's last words to the leaders of Ephesus. I'm reminded of Jesus' last words in John 13 after the last dinner. He says, love one another as I have loved you.

How have I loved you? I've washed your feet. John 14 says, I'm the only way, the truth, and the life. Follow me and only me. In my Father's house there are many rooms.

You must come but only through me. How are you going to get there? By the Holy Spirit is what he says. John 15, he says, abide in me. Bear fruit in me. I'm the vine, you are the branches. Chapter 16, he says, but you can only do that because of the Holy Spirit.

[40:23] And he says, in this world you will have trouble but take heart, I have overcome the world. Those were Jesus' last words. Those are the words that we pay attention to and I hope that these are the words that you pay attention to as I finish my sermon and if you forget everything else in the sermon, I pray that you would remember these.

That we here are all striving to be leaders who bear the image of Paul, who was invested, who was committed to truth, who was consistent, who was persistent, a man of integrity and that we would all be leaders pursuing to be like Christ.

everyone wants to be a leader until they realize how hard it is to be a leader and some stay in the position of leadership because of selfish gain.

Yet we follow someone who lead, who led, who still leads in a different way. Alex Lee in the pre-service prayer led us on that passage and it's just, it has everything you need to know of what it meant to be a leader for Jesus.

Philippians 2. He says, don't do anything. Don't do anything for your own self. Do nothing out of selfish ambition but in humility consider others more significant than yourselves.

[41:44] Let each of you look not only to your own interests but to the interests of others. And you might ask, well how can I do that? I'm selfish, I know you are because I am too. And then he says, have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus.

You can be that kind of leader that is selfless, that is invested when you have this mind among yourselves when you recognize that actually it's Jesus who's going to help you be the leader. And it's his spirit that's going to help you be the leader.

Jesus who, though was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.

He became that boss that came to kneel down by your table and leveled with you. He became that authoritative figure that could have just stayed up there with his arms crossed but he came down to be with you and humbled himself to the point of death, even death on the cross.

That's the kind of leader he wants. That's the kind of leader that we want to be. So I'll finish by asking again, who of you here is a leader? And of course, a leader is anyone who is looking to the interests of those to his left and her left or right.

[43:04] Would we be those kinds of leaders that lay down our lives? Amongst Jesus' last words in John 15, there is no greater love than this, that someone would lay down their lives or their friends. I hope that you can be inspired enough today, exhorted enough today that you would walk out of this room and go, I am so wanting and desperate to be a leader to that person.

I want to lay my life down for them. I want to lay down my priorities for them. You pick where we go for lunch today. I would like to eat what you want to eat. I would like to do the thing that actually you've always been asking me to do but I don't really want to do because I'm selfish and I'm lazy but I want to do it today because I want to lead well.

What's the secret of being a leader despite the hardships? Humility. And he says it and it's just hidden there at the very beginning. Verse 17.

You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia serving the Lord with all humility. I was at the privilege a couple years ago spending time with a leader who was well known who was a great leader.

Lots of people following and I remember asking him as a young blood going hey can you teach me? Teach me how to be a leader. Teach me the skills of a speaker. Teach me how to be someone who leads well.

[44:24] And he said this and he was just like hmm the best leaders are the ones that are humble. And then he just left me there and then he just walked off.

The best leaders in this world are the ones who are the best followers of the kingdom of God. That is all.

Let us follow in the footsteps of Paul. Let us follow him as he follows Jesus. We're going to move into a time of communion now as he said there pay attention to the flock which he bought by his own blood.

We're going to spend the time in communion where we gather around the elements. And so let's just spend a moment now just to reflect. You can even reflect on what kind of leader you are. What kind of leader you were. What kind of leader you want to be. Or maybe the hurt that you've received from a bad leader.

[45:38] How you've been a victim of poor leadership. And I'll stand right here and say I have invested time and tears into this community but I'll also be the first one to say I've made mistakes that I have not led you well.

My prayer my only prayer is that Psalm 27 would become your prayer that you would yearn and hunger just for Jesus.

Please please don't look to me. I will fail you. But look to him. He is the author and he's the perfecter of your faith of my faith of our faith.

Let's spend a moment just to examine our own hearts whatever is coming up whatever the Holy Spirit leads in you and then we'll take the elements together. so as we reflect on leadership again would we center our hearts on Jesus our king, our chief leader, the one who adorned himself in humility humility to the point of becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on our cross so before we leave from here if you just spend a moment, just 30 seconds just you and the Lord just asking the spirit what does obedience look like for me this week Jesus how may I follow after you more this week how may I put aside my own desires in humility for those to my left, those to my right, my family my friends, those

I work with, those that are difficult to love, so would we lift those people up to the Lord now, would we lift up our hearts to the Lord now just for a few moments Jesus, we look to you you set the example of what it means to love to lead and to give of yourself so as your people we confess that it's hard for us yet we declare Lord, we want to be those people who embody sacrificial love to those around us so fill us by your spirit send us from here Lord we're grateful for your love for us Jesus, we pray this all in your name Amen