

What The Church Needs

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[0 : 00] All right, thank you, Lisa. Good morning, everybody. How's everyone doing? Good to see you. Good to see you. All right. Like Lisa said, my name is Jesse, just one of the pastors, and not the only guy here that leads this particular site of One Harbor Church.

Two of our other guys, the other elders, they are on vacation. We really value rest. And I know for a lot of us, we're kind of coming into that season. It's summer vacation. It's beautiful outside.

And so we just want to encourage you, like, man, take this season of rest. It's like a great opportunity to be with family. Some of us might have kids. It's summer's off.

It's summer break. We really get good, focused time with them and take advantage of that. We really want to be a church that disciples people into the importance of rest because we live in a go, go, go society that is always, like, pushing us to run as hard as we can, as long as we can, redlining, which isn't healthy for us.

God made us creatures. And creatures need rest. God himself rested. And he calls us to rest. And we don't rest. That's not the destination. The destination of our life isn't like, let me get to a point where I don't have to do anything.

[1 : 12] Like, rest, the biblical understanding of rest is resting to head into work, to prepare us for work, right? But in a healthy way so we're not burning ourselves out.

And so both Alan and Elliot are on little vacations right now. And I am so stoked for them. Can't wait to have them back, though. But that's what they are doing. And, man, just, like, guys, enjoy this beautiful area and the beautiful creation God has made.

While it's nice and warm and sunny outside, get some rest this summer, okay? All right. We are in and continuing our local church series. That was not my sermon, by the way.

That was just, like, a little fatherly moment for us as a side. I just wanted to say, hey, pass it on to you. We're continuing our local church series. And so, so far we've looked at what the church is.

The church is not buildings like this. Like, when you think of, hey, I'm coming to church, don't think of I'm coming to a building. Church is God's people, and it's his people that he saved.

[2 : 18] And it's a people that's been captivated by his grace and his goodness, as we see in the face of Jesus on the cross, in his death and resurrection for us.

And because we've been captivated by that, it calls us to him. But as he calls us to himself, what we find out is we're coming together with a lot of other people. Right?

He brings us together. And that's what church does. Church gathers around Jesus, which is why we gather around communion and celebrate. And we'll do that at the end of service.

But that is a beautiful picture of how Jesus gathers us. And then last week we looked at how, as a church, we gather together to worship him. We come together to enjoy one another, but we're coming together to look up and exalt him and praise him, like we sang, who is worthy.

Who is worthy of all praise. And so that's what we do. And then we scatter back out. We go into our lives, but we don't go scared. We don't go to hide out in the world until next Sunday comes around, and then we can go to our safe place.

[3 : 23] Now we scatter into mission. Right? We have the truth of the gospel, and we have the Holy Spirit, that we get to go into our workplaces. We get to go into our schools. We get to go into our homes, into our families.

And we get to be salt and light. We get to hold Jesus out in all of those places. That's what the local church is. That's what the local church does. And now what we're going to do is we're going to pivot for the next three Sundays.

We're going to look at what the local church needs. And so this sermon today is focusing on the local church's need for leaders, but not just leaders loving leaders.

Now there is a couple of different ways to approach this. It can be a very academic thing where we get into like the nitty-gritty of what the Bible says about New Testament church leaders and who they were and what those words mean and all that stuff.

And there's nothing wrong with that. Actually, it could be very helpful because it could help us avoid an unbiblical model of leadership where we're just adding layers upon layers just because we think that's what we should do.

[4 : 22] And I think too often what the church can be guilty of is looking at business models out in the world and seeing like, hey, that's pretty successful.

Let's adopt that. Not realizing that actually the word sufficiently gives us the model of biblical leadership that God wants for his church.

And so we are going to do that. We are going to look at leaders. We're going to help define what those leadership roles are, probably more in brief summary, but that's not where I want to spend the bulk of my time.

Where I want to spend the bulk of our time today is on the character of leadership in God's church. Because you know what? He talks a lot about that for his leaders. The local church needs loving leadership.

And here's the thing. Even if you've got the right biblical model for leadership nailed down, if those leaders are unhealthy and lack character, the results are going to just end up disastrous.

[5 : 22] I mean, we all have known and seen plenty of examples throughout church history, some further in the past, some a lot more recent, of just abusive church leaders who have really done damage to both the people in the church and the name of Jesus, unfortunately.

And they got a pass maybe because they were very talented and gifted men or women. And they were experiencing ministry success. And so it was like, hey, man, they're too important to really call them to account.

They're too important to point these character flaws out. We just got to like, hey, we'll give them, we'll kind of nod and wink at it. Maybe, maybe, hopefully, they'll kind of like fix themselves. And we've seen the results of that.

We've seen things go horribly, horribly wrong. And it's easy when that happens to get jaded with regards to church leadership. And we just see how it fails again and again and again.

But we have to be careful in response to that. We don't throw the good baby of a biblical model of loving leadership out with the bathwater of toxic, dangerous, abusive leaders in the church.

[6 : 31] And that's what we can tend to do when we see that happen, right? Martin Luther, he likens history and even church history to a drunk man who gets up on a horse, falls off one side just to get back up and fall on the other side.

And what he's saying is, man, it's so easy to swing from one extreme to the other. So what happens is we can go from putting gifted leaders up on a pedestal and exalting them almost to the point where it's like they're equivalent to Jesus.

Like we would actually say, you know what, Jesus, I'd rather follow this God than really follow you because he's pretty amazing. And we treat them as infallible or untouchable.

And then invariably, because nobody's meant to be on a throne except Jesus, nobody's meant to be made an idol of except Jesus, invariably what happens is those guys can't handle that because none of us are created to do that.

And so what happens? They implode and explode. And there's shrapnel all over the place. And they hurt themselves. They hurt the people close to them. And there's fallout from all kinds of ways.

[7 : 38] People get hurt. And so we look at that and we swing to the other extreme, which is like, you know what, leadership bad, no leadership good, right? We want to mistrust and ditch the idea of leadership altogether.

But the Bible says, no, no, no. The New Testament gives us ample evidence that God wants his church to have leaders and that the church actually needs good, loving leaders. So we're going to be in Acts 14.

That's going to be our launching out verse. So Acts 14, and we're going to be in verse 21, and it says this. Let me give us a bit of context before we jump to it.

If you have your Bibles, you can kind of make your way to Acts 14 right now. I'm going to give us a bit of context. You can like start getting there in your Bible, or you can turn on your phone and get there on your like Bible app, whatever it is. But so what happened is Paul and Barnabas get released to go and spread the gospel to the Mediterranean world.

And so they go about, and they have success. They preach in these different places, and they gather believers, and these gatherings are happening, right? And so what they do is now they're coming back through those places where people have surrendered to Jesus.

[8 : 45] They've created this community of people, and look what it says they did. And when they, Paul and Barnabas, had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, these places.

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed. And so you see this planting of church, this apostolic going forth, churches being planted, but then what do they do?

They come back and they set in proper leaders, which is when you see that it says appointed elders, that's what we're talking about. We're talking about the leaders in the church. Now, I want to help define some terms here because maybe you're not familiar with the word elder here.

A lot of us are more familiar with pastor. And we kind of think as elders as those guys on the church board. They're the business-minded guys. That's the thing they do, but the pastor, they're the guys that kind of do the ministry and they sit with the people and they preach on a Sunday and they're the lovey-dovey guys, but these guys over here do the other thing.

There's no such thing in the Bible. The Bible doesn't split those things up. In fact, the Bible uses elder whenever it talks about church leadership, right? It says the apostles ordained elders who, and what they did is they pastored.

[10 : 07] If you're wondering where the word pastor came from, it's not like we just invented it and just, you know. Now, that word pastor came from the verb to pastor, to shepherd, which is what elders do.

That's what we're called to do. A part of our job is to shepherd God's people, right? But the other thing they're called to do that we see in Scripture is they're also to provide oversight over the church as well.

So, in a sense, they're with the sheep, caring for the sheep, leading the sheep, loving the sheep, but they're also there to provide oversight, right? They're there to make sure the church is going well, that things are in order.

And that's what elders do. It's not three different types of roles. It's one role. That's what we do. And elder is not just this title, right? I don't want you to think, like, from this point on, you need to call me Elder Jesse, right?

In fact, I don't even like when people call me Pastor Jesse, because the Bible is very clear. Titles are not important. In fact, titles can be very dangerous. When we look at how the Bible, how Paul refers to himself throughout the New Testament, he doesn't say, I, Apostle Paul.

[11 : 20] What does he say? He's like, Paul, an apostle. The apostle described the work that God called him to do, right? He didn't carry it as a title.

I am Jesse, an elder at One Harbor Church in New Bern. That's me. So hopefully now we can move on from defining our terms.

We're kind of comfy with elder being a pastor. Pastors and elders, same thing happening here, right? So why are elders necessary? Why are church leaders necessary?

Well, Paul, the Apostle Paul, he gives us good insight. Titus 1 to 5. Titus 1 verse 5 says this. So he leaves Titus in this place, Crete, and he says, this is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order.

How? And appoint elders in every town as I directed you. So Paul's in this place. He's in this state or nation, and there's these believers in all these different towns.

[12 : 26] And Paul says, you know what? I need us. I need to make sure that God's church is in good order. Go and appoint elders in all those faith communities. And that's what loving leadership does.

Loving leadership brings order. And that is a good thing because the opposite of order is chaos. Chaos is never a good thing.

And the best example of how order is so much better than chaos is actually Genesis 1. We don't have to go very far. We open up our Bibles, and the very first thing is what we see is God describes creation as it is, right?

And it is not a good thing. He looks at the earth, and it says it's formless. It's void. Darkness covered the waters. And what that is, to the ancient reader, they would have heard that, and they would have heard like, oh, that is chaos.

That is what's happening there. And chaos is death. Chaos isn't a good place to be. And so what does God do? He begins to speak out order.

[13 : 32] He begins to speak out creation. Let there be, and it was so. Let there be light. Let there be a sun to govern the day, and a moon to govern the night, and stars to govern the season, and all these things.

Let there be. Let me put a border on where the waters can stop, and there's land. There's order to all of these things. And God's order, what we see and how he creates, it's beautiful, and it's vast, and it's diverse.

He sets boundaries and restrictions. But all of them working together in harmony. So think about this, when you and I enjoy a beautiful Carolina sunset, think about this.

You are enjoying that because of God's created order. The earth's restricted movement around the sun that God has ordained allows the moment where the sun's light comes and hits it at a certain angle or at a certain moment where colors interact with the sky and cloud and land and sea, and we just get to enjoy this beautiful moment.

Order is good. Order brings life and beauty. And in God's church, that's what his loving leaders are meant to do. They're meant to bring order.

[14 : 50] And here's a great example of how God wants loving leaders to do this. Genesis 2.15. So God creates everything, and then it says this. The Lord God took the man he created, Adam, and he put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

So God takes Adam, and he puts him in charge of a garden. He doesn't say, Adam, you've got to take care of the whole world. You've got to go figure that out. That would be pretty overwhelming, right?

What does he say? He's like, Adam, I'm going to give you one little local spot, one little plot of ground to take care of, Garden of Eden. That's yours, buddy, to cultivate and to keep.

And those words are super important. When we see the word, when it says he put Adam in there to work it, that word means to cultivate, right? Beautiful word, cultivate.

And to keep it means to guard or watch over very closely. And so what we learn is from these commands, which we're going to look at, like both of them, but the first one is we see that loving leadership, what it does, it cultivates the local church God sets them in.

[16 : 02] The Hebrew word here, cultivate, it's so rich in meaning. It is like, man, it is a beautiful word, but it means so much more than just to cultivate. It also implies this watchful care to make sure something grows to its full potential.

That's what it's talking about here. And what a beautiful, important model for church leadership of how we think about what we're meant to do. God puts Adam in a local garden, think like local church, and he puts him in charge to care for all the plants in that garden to cultivate them.

So what they're going to do is they're going to grow and flourish to their full potential. And in that way, the garden is going to become more and more beautiful as it becomes everything God designed it to be.

And when we think about what leaders do to bring order, it's the kind of order that fosters this kind of life and brings out the fullness of God's design for every plant in his garden.

That's us. The Apostle Paul says this when writing to the church in Ephesus, thinking about how leaders and what they do is to cultivate and bring every plant in the garden into flourishing.

[17 : 17] He says this, Jesus gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers leadership roles to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

What is it telling us here? Man, loving leadership is a good thing. What it does, it cultivates by equipping the saints. Saints aren't like special people that do miracles.

The Bible, when it talks about saints, he talks about everybody in the church. You are all saints. You are all sanctified. You are all called by him. They cultivate by equipping the saints to do ministry.

That's what we do. It's not just me doing ministry up here or Philip when he's up here on a Sunday and whoever else is up here doing ministry. No, no, no. We are equipping everybody to do ministry, which means because you're saved by Christ, you are qualified to do ministry.

You don't have to get a seminary degree. Our little secret. And this isn't me trying to get out of a job either, right? I'm not like, hey, I'm going to like, I got too much work.

[18 : 41] I'm going to make you all do it. And I'm just going to sit back, sipping Mai Tais at home. This is not what I'm talking about. This is Jesus showing us what must happen for his local church, his gardens to flourish to their fullest potential.

An unhealthy bad leadership, what happens is they create an environment where people will just come to be impressed by them and their gifts and their ministry.

They kind of promote themselves and say, hey, look at me. I want your praise. I just want you out there just rooting me on and say, wow, my pastor is so awesome. He can do this and he can do that and da, da, da, da, da.

Where all we're doing is coming to be entertained. Unhealthy bad leadership, what we can tend to do is use our gifting and use people to build our platforms bigger and bigger, which is not what God wants us to do at all.

We can hoard ministry because it's the avenue for power and praise, but loving leadership doesn't do that, right? It's not after praise and it's not after spotlights.

[19 : 44] It doesn't get territorial like, hey, whoa, whoa, whoa, stepping on my toes here, buddy, coming into my ministry. This is mine. You don't get to do it. No, we're not like that at all.

We're not territorial about my ministry. We're not using people to build up our platforms. If we have a platform, we are using it to build people. And what we do is we equip people to do ministry so that more ministry can be done.

That's what we're after. We're not after accolades. We're after multiplying the ability of more ministry that can happen in the church, which is going to do something beautiful for the church.

It's going to strengthen it. It's going to encourage it. It's going to make us more impactful, both in here but out there as well. Here's a great example of this. Case study, Acts chapter 6.

Okay, this is coming on the heels of like the church just starting. Like 3,000 people got added. It's rocking and rolling.

[20 : 45] There's revival happening. They're like meeting in groups. They're studying together. They're sharing food together. It is like it is church as it should be. And it's growing all the time.

So more and more people have been added. And then we had a little snag here. Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, awesome, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews.

Uh-oh. Because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. So we see a little problem here. There's a little snag to the unity and the beauty that's happening.

And there's potential for them to get it wrong and for things to really go awry and fall apart. And they don't go and they don't tell the Hellenists like, would you just stop complaining?

I mean, isn't it good enough that Jesus died for you and we get to be together? He says this, And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

[21 : 50] Now that can start to sound like you're saying this is better than this. But it says, Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And what they said pleased the whole gathering. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip and Prochorus and Nicanor.

These are some fun names. And Timon and Parmenas and Nicholas. Like, yeah. Obviously the last guy was Greek. Because I think like every second dude that's a Greek is named Nicholas.

These, they sat before the apostles and they prayed and laid their hands on them. So the church leadership was so wise.

They didn't hoard ministry. What they did is they saw the problem and they said, You know what? We're going to entrust this to other people. They realized their own limitations, right?

[22 : 53] They weren't too proud to say like, Oh, we can do this, preach the word and prayers, and we can do the serving of tables. They were humble enough to say like, Hey, man, I can't do everything.

And you know what? What happens if church leaders don't do that? Man, you end up doing everything really badly, right? There's a friend of mine visited a church one time on Christmas.

And he said like, He's like, Jess, this is the perfect example of why you need to multiply ministry. And so he's there and it's a special service. And the pastor just did everything during that service.

And at some point, Apparently, he was supposed to be doing some like handbell special. You know those handbell like silver things? They all have different like tones. And he was going to do a special handbell thing.

And he's running this way and doing this. And it's like everything that he did was just terrible, unfortunately. But everyone's like, Oh, you know, he's really sincere. Man, it's good to know that you can't do everything.

[23 : 54] It is really good to know you can't do it. I can't do everything. I'm terrible at a lot of stuff. And you know what? I've had to learn to say like, Hey, Jess, it's good that you're terrible at a lot of stuff. Stick to the stuff you're good at.

And then release people into the stuff you don't do good at. Because you know what? They're a lot better at it than you. And just be okay with that. It's good. And so what happens is, This is an abdicating ministry.

I'm not saying like, Oh, I'm taking my hand. I don't want to do it. So I'm just like, whatever. Abdicating my ministry responsibilities. But they didn't stop doing this ministry to focus on that ministry.

They weren't like, Well, you know what? I guess right now that's what we need. So we're just going to ignore the preaching of the word and prayer. And we're just going to be serving tables. That's what our church is going to be about now. We're just going to be serving tables.

It's like, no, they were able to entrust the work to others. So both things could move forward. And what happens is that the widows weren't being overlooked anymore.

[24 : 52] They were now being taken care of. Cultivation. And because there were deacons set in and they were doing that ministry, it freed the elders to continue doing the ministry that was vital for what they were called to do.

Right? Which was ministry of the word and prayer. I don't know if you know this, but at One Harbor we do have deacons. And no, they do not wear name tags on Sundays so you know who they are.

But it's the staff that we have that lead our hospitality ministry and our kids ministry and our youth ministry and our music and media ministry. And what we've done as elders is we've seen people that are competent and qualified and able to do those things well.

And we said, man, we can't do what we need to do in caring for you and loving you and shepherding you along with all those other responsibilities. There's just no way we can do all that. And so we delegated that authority to these people and we entrusted it to them and they were trustworthy people as well.

And that's what we did. They are doing ministry. And because of that, and because of how good they are, man, we see more cultivation. We see more building up in this church.

[26 : 05] And when you multiply ministry, you end up multiplying the amount of cultivation. And also, look what that leads to, right? It says at the end in Acts, it sends a verse 7 at the end of that little section of Acts 6.

And the word of God continued to increase cultivation. And the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, cultivation. And a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

And that little local church garden of Jerusalem, as ministry multiplied, so did the number of disciples. That is a beautiful thing.

That garden was flourishing. What is helpful about this recorded moment in Acts is that it not only points to the power of cultivation, it also points to something else that is important for what leaders are meant to be doing.

And that's keeping watch. Loving leadership keeps close watch on the local church that God sets them in. And no, I'm not talking like Big Brother kind of keeping watch, right?

[27 : 13] It's not like we are trying to be in your life watching every single moment. We're not the Holy Spirit police that is after you and like border. It's not like we're borderline stalking everybody.

That's not what we're talking about. But still, loving leaders have to be attentive. We have to be attentive to what's going on in our local church. We have to be attentive to the people that God has put in our care.

For all the cultivating we do to make God's garden flourish, we also have to realize that there are real threats that can spoil its beauty.

And there are two things. One is little foxes and one and the other is fierce wolves. And we're going to look at them. Song of Solomon talks about the little foxes in chapter 2, verse 15.

It says, catch the foxes for us. The bride is saying to her bridegroom, catch the foxes for us. The little foxes that spoil the vineyards for our vineyards are in blossom.

[28 : 13] The bride is saying to her bridegroom, their garden is in danger. And you know what foxes are not? Big or scary, right?

I live in a neighborhood. We drive around and I'll see a fox every once in a while. Those things do not freak me out. I'm not like, if I was to come on one hiking, I wouldn't be like, oh no, I'm going to die. There is a fox.

Right? That's not what we think. Foxes aren't big and scary. They're sneaky. Right? They hide themselves really well. They're hard to catch. They're very elusive.

They're good about being elusive. And that's what sin is like because that's what the little foxes are going to be. They're going to be working in us to spoil the vineyard, spoil the flourishing that God can be doing in us and through us.

It's little sins that chip away at our love and our unity for one another. And I can give a long list of what those sinful actions are, but I want to get below the surface. I don't want to be like, hey, let's look at the fruit.

[29 : 15] Let's get below the surface into our hearts, into the roots of where those things are coming from because everything that comes out of us actually originates in our hearts.

And I want to use James chapter 3 verse 16. I think he gets at a couple of little foxes that can ruin the vineyards that were planted in.

He says this, and this is not just true for you. This is true for leaders as well. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

Think about that. You have jealousy and you have selfish ambition. Jealousy desires what others have. Selfish ambition desires others to be jealous of you.

And what does that say? What does this say that jealousy and selfish ambition produces? What does it say? Disorder.

[30 : 15] Opposite of order. Opposite of flourishing. Opposite of cultivation. Out of jealousy and out of selfish ambition, out of the hearts come all kinds of ugly things.

It's gossip. It's slander. It's divisions. From a leadership perspective, it could be manipulation. It could be control. It could be anger. It could be all those things. And these little foxes are a danger to God's church.

So leaders have to be on watch. Look at what Paul says to the Ephesian elders, right? Verse 20, or chapter 20, verse 28 of Acts. He says, pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock.

And I think quickly we see like, oh yeah, pay attention to all the flock. But he's saying this to leaders. Man, you have to, as a leader, pay careful attention to yourself. Not just the people in your church.

So we got to watch out for you guys. But I got to watch out for what's going on in here in my heart. Because arguably, I'm a bigger danger to this church than you are. Seriously.

[31 : 16] Seriously. If I get it wrong, and if little foxes start to get into my heart and start to take control and start to ruin what comes out of me, is super, super dangerous.

And while we pay careful attention, and that's why we pay careful attention to the little foxes, we should be doing that. You should be doing that in your own heart. That's why community is beautiful.

We could watch out together for the little foxes because we all have blind spots. We all think our little foxes are cuter than everyone else's little foxes, right? We got to pay careful attention to deal with those little foxes.

But you know what? There's little foxes. There's also fierce wolves as well. And that's what loving leaders got to watch out for. Verse 29, that same chapter of Acts that we were just looking at, he goes on to tell the Ephesian elders, I know, Paul says to them, I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you.

Fierce wolves will come into your church, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.

[32 : 34] Therefore, be alert. Now, we've had fierce wolves come into one harbor over the years. We've had guys spreading false doctrine.

Seriously. Guys saying that Jesus isn't like what we're preaching, it's like what he's saying. He had this new revelation.

And we realized that, you know what, we weren't going to win him over. And he was convinced that he was doing God's work. And so we had to ask him to stop coming to church because he wasn't going to submit to us as leaders in the doctrine we were teaching.

And so every time we saw him talking to someone, we were like, man, there is a high potential. He's trying to lead somebody astray. And pull them away from the truth of the faith. And he actually, we asked him to stop coming.

He came back and we had to ask some very kind leaders in our church to escort him outside. One of them used to be a center that played for the UNC Tar Heels, which is always nice to have big, strong guys to be able to do that.

[33 : 43] Right? We gently did that. And he gently left. But fierce wolves will come and do that. And it's not just false doctrine.

We've had to deal with men and women coming in to purposefully try to seduce people into sexual sin in the church. Those are fierce wolves.

And we had to pull them to the side. And you say, you either need to change what you're doing or you're not welcome here anymore. We got to protect the people against these fierce wolves.

And here's the thing about wolves. It says, like, they're going to come from among you. It would be so nice if fierce wolves wore t-shirts that said, I'm a fierce wolf. That would be great. But they don't do that.

They don't do that. They come in sheep's clothing. They fit in really well for a while. They camouflage themselves. But eventually, eventually, they're going to figure out who they can target, who they can go after.

[34 : 45] And what they start to do is they start to isolate, just like a predator does. And if a leader in the church is caught up in selfish ambition and petty jealousy, what he is doing, he is too busy thinking about himself and looking at himself to pay close attention to the flock.

But the loving leader cares so much for his people. He cares so much about the garden that he's tending and how they're doing and keeping them safe and healthy and flourishing.

He is going to stay alert. He is never going to let his guard down. He's always scanning. He's always watching. And it's not that I'm looking at you and I'm like, hmm, mistrusting.

No, we just want to be in your lives. That's how we fleshed out these former wolves is we weren't distant. My job isn't to stand up here from a pulpit and never get down into your lives.

And that's why we need to multiply eldership because the reality is it's impossible for me to get into all of your lives. But the more elders that are raised up and are able to serve and love this bride, the more that we can be as an eldership team working together to be with the sheep and among the sheep, loving you and knowing what's going on.

[36 : 04] And should anything arise out of that, we can deal with it. And leaders that spend a lot of time with their people know them well and they're able to sniff out that wolf early before they can cause too much damage.

Good, loving leadership produces order. They produce flourishing through cultivation, protection. But it's not all on the leaders, right? It's not like, hey, it's all on us to make sure this garden is flourishing.

The local church also needs good followers. But here's the thing. Loving leadership invites joyful submission. You know, the S word, submission, it makes us uneasy, right?

We live in a day and age where it's like, eee. You know why? Because it's been used so often by bad leaders to club people into doing what they want. You better submit to me. Which is actually the opposite of submission.

Submission is not coercion. It's not. Loving leadership doesn't impose itself. It has to be invited. Spiritual authority is never imposed.

[37 : 08] It's always invited. It has to be. And that's why the Bible calls us to submit ourselves. Hebrews 13, 17 says, obey your leaders and submit to them. For they, why?

So they, if you don't, they're going to give you a spanking, spiritual spanking. That's not what it says. Why? They keep watch over your souls. They're caring for you. They're watching out for you. And you know what?

They are those leaders will have to give an account. So let them do this with joy and not with groaning. Can I say, I don't do, I don't lead with groaning here. Y'all are wonderful.

So thank you for that. For that would be of no advantage to you. Our modern day, our current cultural moment, we, it highly values freedom and autonomy and individuality.

So much so that we're convinced, we've convinced ourselves, I think, that submission is a bad thing. And that actually, I am able to live unsubmitted.

[38 : 07] And I would say, man, there's nothing more untrue. Because we are all submitted to something. What is the thing that you're submitted to?

Well, it's the thing that you hold most important. It's the thing that is like kind of your identity. What you identify yourself around. That could be, it could be wealth.

The pursuit of wealth. It could be a career. It could be your job. Right? It could be the pursuit of pleasure. Of just having fun. Living for the weekend. He who has the most toys dies with the most toys wins.

That kind of thing. You could be submitted to political persuasions and politicians. You could be submitted to a certain moral code and set of ethics.

We are all submitted to something. Which is the essence of discipleship. Discipleship is being submitted to something. So, you could say like, I'm not a disciple of Jesus right now.

[39 : 03] That's cool. Glad you're here. But you know what? You are a disciple of something. Because discipleship, when you look at the Bible, discipleship. Disciples would come and they would take on what is called a yoke. It's the teaching of the teacher.

And they would take on that yoke to follow it and to obey it. But they would also follow and imitate their disciple or their teacher. And that's what is happening. And that's what we all do.

We all have a yoke we're choosing to be under. You know, there's people that they grow up in the church and they listen to all this stuff. And then they go off and then they kind of find their own way.

And they think like, I've kindly like shed the yoke of Jesus from off of me. Now I'm free. And I'm thinking, no. You've just invited new authority into your life. That's all you've done. Something else from outside has, you have said like, that is what I agree with.

That is truth. That is authoritative. I'm going to follow it and I'm going to obey it. We are all disciples of something. But here's the beautiful thing about what Jesus calls us into.

[40 : 07] Matthew 11, 28 to 30. Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you.

Take my authority upon you. Take my truth and my teaching and my ways and my commands upon you. And learn from me.

Invitation. For I am gentle and lowly in heart. And you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

I want to say this to us that really struggle with thinking of like, man, I don't know if I could be submitted to a church leader. Loving leaders in the church have responded to what Jesus called them to right there.

They've already taken on Jesus' easy and light yoke. And good leaders, we are not calling you, as good leaders, we're not calling you to something different. All we are doing is calling you to join us.

- [41 : 06] We've said, man, we have found something beautiful in Jesus Christ. We have found something amazing and freeing in taking on his yoke, his light burden.
- Come and join with us. Paul says it this way. Follow me as I follow Christ. That's what we want you to do. Not for our own glory because we want you to know Jesus all that much more.
- We want you to be under his authority because you know what? He's the perfect, loving leader that cultivates and keeps his garden. John 10, verse 27.
- Jesus says this, my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish. I give them eternal life, cultivation.
- The most perfect and complete and the fullness of cultivation. And they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand. He's the shepherd who keeps us.
- [42 : 09] He is the good leader who never loses one of us and protects us. That's all I got as a leader. That's all I got is holding out Jesus to you as I try my best to follow him and submit to him.
- All of our work, all of our service, all of our submission is an invitation to love him more and to see him as better than everything. Jesus alone has the power to cultivate his church to its full and potential beauty.
- As the band comes up, I just want to think of a couple of ways we can respond. First, I want to say if you're in the room and you're here and you're not yet a Christian, man, I just want to say, man, we love that you're here.
- Keep coming, keep hearing these words. And you've heard a lot about leadership and you've probably seen a lot of toxic, bad leadership all over the place. It's all over the news.
- Maybe you've seen it in church even. And I'm not saying come and be oppressed, impressed by me or oppressed by me for that matter. All I got for you is Jesus.
- [43 : 18] That's all I can hold out for you. He came to give us life. He came to give you life. And it says he just doesn't give it in drips and drabs. He gives it abundantly.
- He gives life in its fullness, complete, perfect. In return, he calls you to believe, to surrender, and submit to him as Lord and Savior.
- To stop living for yourself and to live for him and in him and through him. It's invitation. It's not imposition. And I want to call you to hear that invitation and to respond today by putting your faith in him who died for your sins and who loves you.
- If you're here and you're already a Christian, I want us to take time in a moment to examine our hearts. I want to invite us to do that before we step into communion.
- And for some of us, I hope, in a very gentle, kind way, this message stirred for you maybe a desire for leadership and pursuing leadership in Jesus' church.
- [44 : 25] And that's a good thing. He says, man, it's a noble calling, he calls it. That's okay. But, man, I would say, start that journey by coming and talking to me about that today.
- I would love to begin that conversation and start that journey with you. Maybe you are a leader in Jesus' church or you've been a leader.
- And through this, God's convicted you of some stuff. And I want to say, man, now's the time to go and enjoy God's grace. Go and repent to him.
- Repent to him for those things that he's highlighting. And you know what? If part of that has been hurting some people, go to them and repent to them too. Maybe you've just been a bad follower, right?
- You've been under good leadership, but you've just been a bad follower. God's leading you to repent of that. Man, it's never too late. His grace is there to say, man, I'm going to turn. But maybe you carry the wounds of past leadership.

[45 : 34] Stuff that church leaders have done to you that God hates, that doesn't represent who Jesus is as a leader.

And I just want you to know that I know you're grieving and you're lamenting those things, and so does God. God doesn't look at those moments and be like, meh. He hates when his leaders mishandle his bride.

He's jealous for you. But what I want to do is I want to ask you to invite Jesus into that pain. Invite him into that pain and ask him to help you trust his leaders again.

Trust him, church leadership again. And ask him to, man, Lord, help me. You know, help me, lead me to some good ones. I hope that's us. I want to be a good leader.

We want to be good leaders. Before we examine and take time, I actually just want to pray for that last group. Maybe there's some of you in the room that you have those wounds.

[46 : 41] Let's pray together. Lord, you are the good shepherd. You are gentle and lowly. Isaiah speaks of you as being so kind and so gentle that you wouldn't even break a bruised reed.

A smoldering candle you wouldn't even snuff out. Lord, you are so caring, so delicate, so tender with us. I pray for those in the room that, man, church leadership has just done a number on them.

Lord, come into that pain with them. Come into that hurt with them.

Let them know that you are near, that you care, that you love, and begin a healing process. Amen. That brings them into trust. Amen.

Before we take communion, I'm going to give us just a few moments to examine our hearts and to respond to what the Holy Spirit's been stirring. And then I'm going to lead us into communion together. Let's just bow our heads and do that right now.

[47 : 59] Would you stand with me? Communion is remembering Jesus, our great leader.

What he did for us to be a church. It says he obtained it with his own blood, his own sacrifice. He is the leader that served to give his life.

So that we could flourish. We could grow in the fullness of him. And he's the leader that keeps us and protects us and guards us.

Because he loves us so much. And this reminds us of how much he loved us. And so as we take the thing that represents the bread that represents his broken body, let's remember his love for us and his blood shed for the forgiveness of our sin.

His love for us. Let's eat and drink together. Let's eat and drink together.