

Eldership - a practical study (2)

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[0:00] Just to say a little bit to bring up to speed people who weren't here last week. The aim of these studies is to help us find the will of God regarding future ministry at Calvary! Church by going back to first principles. It would be really neat if somewhere in some undiscovered part of the Bible actually had the name and address of the next future paid elder, but it doesn't.

But we can trust that God does promise to guide and provide for his people through his word and by his spirit. So we presume that's actually a better method than putting the email address in code somewhere in the almost unread chapters of Job. This involves us as a church in prayer.

It sets us praying. It sets us looking at ourselves to see where we're at and the situation where God has put us. And it teaches us, because we don't have any real alternative, to trust God and to learn, hopefully to learn, more about his ways by experience. I'm not sure we're ever so good at that either.

If we look back, we can look back some of us to the time when the church met in the room next door, because the ceiling here and the roof was dangerous and out of action. And we thought, how will God ever deal with that? Well, here we are in this room. We thought we would be in perpetual problems with the railway mission about the tenure and ownership of this building. And that seemed an insurmountable problem. But God has enabled us to do something which we would have thought pretty much impossible to actually purchase this building, which is a situation we're now in. And we are meant to learn from those experiences that as God was able to do things we thought impossible in the past, he can do the same in the future. We've been going through the book of Isaiah, in which the repetitive message is trust in the Lord. So I think we ought to trust in the Lord. And we've been thinking about the teaching of the Lord as our shepherd. And that's the background of our whole subject.

And if the Lord is our shepherd, we will not lack any good thing. That's the testimony of Psalm 23. We were looking at wilders, water elders, what are they like? How do you get them? What do they do?

[2:34] And how do they do it? That's the bit we'll look at today. Broad brush. I looked at a few things last time. And I got to this point, the elders had various descriptive titles. And we'll pick up this morning from that point and then go on from there. So this is where we got to last time.

The elders in the New Testament, that's what churches had if they were to be complete. One of the titles was Presbyter, or the Greek equivalent, which means older.

And we have a denomination of churches called Presbyterians because of the link with that idea of having elders. Another title for the elders was Episkopos, which is translated overseer, because epi means over and scopos means to see. And through some tortuous method, that has come into English as bishop. I can't see quite how they managed that, but that's the way bishop comes. So a bishop is an overseer. We also had the idea of being a shepherd. And a shepherd, as we were saying, as the children were telling us, looks after sheep. And there's some other descriptive words that we're going to look at this morning. So examples, those who rule, or rule in some sense. And that's what we'll start off by looking at. So our questions this morning are, what do they do and how do they do it?

Okay, are you with me so far? That's what we're planning to do. You'll need a Bible. So we're going to look at what do they do. And we're going to look at the shepherding part of it.

And I'll just quickly say what I'm not going to say. I am going to deny that they are a law unto themselves. Elders are not meant to be autocrats, but they are under the Lord. And they are meant to set an example as a sort of servant-heartedness. And they are not, in my understanding of the church, the supreme authority is Jesus. And he exercises that authority through the church assembled.

[5:01] So the authority of the elders does not derive from themselves, nor does it derive from somebody outside like a bishop who appointed them. But the authority of the elders derives from the church to which they are called and by which they are appointed. So Chris and I are elders of this church because we were called to this church and set apart by this church to be elders. We are not elders of CCK, for example. So if we marched in there and said, we're elders, we've been appointed elders, and this is what you should do. They would say, no, our church didn't appoint you as elders.

That's your church. So there's a little thing about that. Anyway, those are some things just to, so that we don't have lots of confusions in our minds before we've even started. Let's look at 1 Peter chapter 5. And I want to pick up this question, what do they do? 1 Peter chapter 5, verse 2. 2 Peter chapter 5, verse 2.

And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. So I just want to examine those words a little bit more closely. So the first thing it says, why have I written that? It's supposed to say, ah yes, I know, this is a clunky translation.

A shepherd of thee, in you, flock of God. NIV translates that shepherds, be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care. Well, in the original, the word care doesn't come there.

[7:22] But what it says, be shepherds, shepherd, act as shepherds. Shepherd the flock that is in you, meaning the one that you belong to, or the flock that you are in, that's your flock to look after.

And then he says, not, no, I've missed something. I'm going to be stuck because I haven't got all my books with me. It says, serving as overseers. So that's the bit that I've missed.

And then he says, there's some not, but rather's. Not because you must. Not under constraint. But rather from willingness.

Shepherd this flock, not because you must, but because there's a willingness and a desire within you that you want to do that. That you care. Yeah. And then there's another not, but not for unclean profit.

Not greedy for money, but eager to serve rather voluntarily. So not because it's your job. Not because you get paid for it.

[8:48] But because you want to do that. Because you're eager to do it. And then another not, but rather. Not as if you were lords of a possession.

Not lording it over those entrusted to you. Not as if lords of the possession. But rather being examples to the flock. Rather examples becoming to the flock.

And that's what Peter says. And he makes this promise at the end. And when the chief shepherd, when appears the arch shepherd, the chief shepherd, you will be in receipt of an Amaranthine crown of glory.

An Amaranthine cloud of glory. So what's the metal that, in the X-Men? What's the one with the claws?

That's adamantium, isn't it? Yeah. What's the chap's name with the claws? Wolverine. Wolverine. Yeah. See, I can see I've immediately connected a cultural collection with lots of people.

[9:59] What are you talking about? That's adamantine. This is amarantine. Amaranthine. Anybody know what an amaranth is? Or an amaranth? Amaranth? It's a flower.

It's a flower which they thought of as lasting forever. It's an eternal flower. So that's the word that's used. And it's translated an eternal.

No, it isn't. It's a crown of glory that will never fade away. It's a rather lovely thought, isn't it? A flower that will never fade away. Crown of glory.

So this is this text that Peter gives us. It emphasizes the nature of this role as delegated. The flock does not belong to the shepherds to do with as they see fit.

It's someone else's flock that they're looking after for him. And it's to be heartfelt. It's not just a job. I have to say that my Anglican colleagues do refer to their work as being a job.

[11:03] And they say, well, I'm looking for a job. I've got a new job. I mean, fair enough. It is a position of employment. But it's not just a job, is it? It's not equivalent to any other job.

It's something that one's heart has to be in. And it's not something in which the elders are given carte blanche to get one's own way.

But they're to set an example. And the example surely goes back to the example of Jesus Christ, who is the chief shepherd.

And he said of himself, I came not to be served, but to serve. And we were singing about the servant king and how the cross motive colors everything.

And the cross motive colors the work and role of the elders. They set an example of service. And they lead rather than drive the Middle Eastern shepherd, unlike the shepherds in North Allerton, who have dogs.

[12:20] And you go, come by, come by. And the dog chases the sheep. The Middle Eastern shepherds would go ahead of the sheep. And the sheep would follow the shepherd. And that's the methodology which seems to give us the prevailing mood of shepherding in the New Testament.

Sacrificing rather than profiting financially. The finance motive, because it's a well-paid job, is not to be the motive.

So a little look there at 1 Peter 5. Let's look at Hebrews 13, because we've got another angle coming in there also.

In Hebrews chapter 13, verse 7 and 17 and 24, there is a reference to leaders.

It doesn't say elders, but we presume that that's exactly who they mean. But this time it's a different word. I think it's only used, I think it's only used of these people in these three places.

[13:31] So it's worth a look at what this is saying. In verse 7, he says, remember your leaders. And I'll tell you a bit more about that word in a moment.

But let's just notice he says, remember your leaders. And what does it say about them? They spoke the word of God to you. That's what they did. They spoke the word of God to you.

And he says, consider, meaning take a good look at the outcome of their way of life. The outcome of their conduct.

Take a good look at the outcome of their conduct. And he's bold to say you should imitate their faith. So they're to set an example of faith.

Verse 17 refers to these leaders as well. And it says, obey your leaders. It uses a word that means something like to be persuaded to obey.

[14:36] It's use of obeying the gospel as well, actually, to be persuaded that this is the right thing to do. So be persuaded to obey your leaders and submit to their authority.

Well, those, how many words is it? One, two, three, four words. It's just, if I remember correctly, one word in the original which says, it's a word to be under.

To be, so you translate it, be submissive. So it's setting up a situation in which we're not talking about people who are meant to sort of be in a conflict situation.

We're talking about the normal situation of the leaders leading and the people whom they're leading being persuaded to follow them.

Hence, submit to their authority. Be respectfully under them. And then he tells us a little bit more about these leaders. He says, they keep watch over you as men who must give account.

[15:48] So the word for watch is the word for sleep plus the word for not.

So it originally means they lose sleep over you. It's what the shepherds were doing in the fields at night. They lost sleep because they were watching over the flock.

And the same word is used here. It doesn't necessarily mean elders are bound to sleep badly. But it does mean that there's a sense in which there is a watchfulness that they're supposed to do.

And the word for you, keep watch over you. It says, keep watch over your souls. They keep watch over your souls.

Which is an interesting thing to say. So it's not keeping watch over your bank account or keeping watch over your home decoration scheme or keeping watch over your sartorial mouse.

[16:46] But they're watching over your souls. How are you doing spiritually? Are you still following the Lord? Are you reading the Bible?

Are you thinking about God's word? Are you acting in accordance with it? Or are you forgetting or going off beam? They keep watch over your souls. And it's an important word because it says, They are men who must give an account.

The chief shepherd will say to them, Have you looked after this flock correctly? Have you encouraged them in the right things?

And have you dissuaded them from the wrong things? Have you led them to me? Or have you led them up the garden path? Have you told them the things that I wanted them to hear?

Or have you told them some nonsense? Or have you just told them, just completely omitted to tell them what I was saying? They must give an account.

[17:48] And it says, Obey them so that their work will be a joy and not a burden. And for this would be of no advantage to you.

So just picking up the words. So that with joy they do this. And not groaning. Is sort of what it says. You'd be interested to overhear an elders meeting, wouldn't you?

And you'd know how many times we say, Oh, wasn't that wonderful? And how many times we go, Oh, no! Anyway, I'm not going to tell you. But it says here that there's a responsibility on the congregation to be suitably responsive so that the work of the elders is a joy and not a groan-making, hair-pulling-out thing.

And he goes on to say that would be of no advantage to you. And the word he uses is actually, as I could understand it, a word to do with tax. It would be untax efficient for you, he says.

It just wouldn't help you guys if your leaders are constantly tearing their hair out and are constantly frustrated and dissatisfied.

[19:00] And so the situation that he's looking for is one where the elders are finding joy in seeing what's happening.

And that rubs back off on the congregation who themselves find that this is a beneficial thing for them. The next use of that is in verse 24.

Do you know, I've done the same thing again. I've put up on the screen the version before the version that I actually wanted to show you.

Aren't I silly? I'll see if I can redeem myself in a minute. Verse 24. Greet all your leaders and all God's people, those from Italy.

Those from Italy, send you their greetings. Ciao. So let's do this word leader. I was a bit puzzled by this word leader.

[20:09] I haven't come across it particularly. The word for lead is related to the word for go. It's also used to count.

And I think, how can a word mean go and count at the same time? The nearest thing I can think of is, I don't play poker. Let me just say, I don't play poker.

But I could imagine people playing poker. And somebody says, well, I'm, I don't know anything about poker really. I'm something \$20. And the person who's turned it to sex thinks, what shall I do? What shall I do for my go? And they say, I'll go, I'll go \$20 as well. So there's a sort of a counting aspect to it and a deciding aspect to it.

And that's the nearest I can get to that thought. That, you know, so the poker player assesses the situation, weighs it up, counts it up, and says, by my reckoning, yeah, I'll go for that.

[21:19] I'll, I don't know, raise your \$20. That's what I'll go for. And I think that that is the idea behind this word of the leaders there.

The ones who say, what are we going to go for? Let's weigh this situation up. We need to make a move. We're going to go for this. And there's a sense in which they go ahead, having made a decision, and the shepherding aspect comes of going ahead of the flock and persuading, saying, guys, we can't all go off in different directions.

That's what sheep do without a shepherd. We're shepherding you. We've thought about this. This is what we think we ought to go for. And I want to persuade you to follow on with that. And they are

leaders who go ahead.

That's, I think that's the flavor of that word. And we're also told about they spoke the word of God to you. And as we shall see, that's an important aspect. That's an important thing.

What do they do? They go ahead. They decide things. They speak the word of God. They set an example of faith and conduct. And they lead so as to have people accept their authority.

[22:31] I know in today's very egalitarian sort of culture, we're not a very hierarchical society. And this is a little bit countercultural.

But it is saying that in the church of God, there are those who lead. And the quick response is, in an intelligent way, having been persuaded to do so, to follow.

And that's the situation that's described here. And it's also told that they care for people's souls.

That's what they're doing.

They're caring for souls. How are you getting on in the Lord? How are we doing as a church?

Are we praying? Are we still praying? Are we praying more, if we possibly could, than we were?

How are we concerned for the glory of the Lord? How are we concerned for the lost?

[23:25] How are we concerned to live sacrificially? How are we concerned to look out for one another? It's caring for people's souls. And when this works properly, it accrues joy and benefit in the church.

My colleague, Eric Harmer, who founded the church plant at New Life Church Moolscum, and whatever it was called in those days, he was very insistent on the church evangelizing.

And people sort of groaned about it. And he said, I'm not here to make you a happy church. We're here to be a working church. And I sort of applaud that. I mean, let's get on with the business. We're not there just to make people happy.

But it does say that if it's working properly, it is a happy church. There is joy and benefit in the church. Okay, so those are the texts in Hebrews.

Let's look at the texts in 1 Timothy, which also use a word to do with ruling. 1 Timothy chapter 3.

[24:37] Right, let me try and redeem myself. Do you want to... You just look at 1 Timothy chapter 3. I'll see if I can dial up the one that I was supposed to have on the screen. And if not, I'll just carry on anyway.

Do you know what that is the right one? What have I done? What have I done? No? Okay.

Okay. A funny thing happens.

I'll stand aside. I put the cursor on a slide. And I move the cursor. And it deletes the slide. And I think, why does it do that? I didn't ask it to delete it. But anyway. And I never know that it's gone.

Let me just tell you what I was going to say that has disappeared. And what I was going to say was.

This is looking at why elders. And there's another question that we actually ought to ask before we say why elders.

[25:51] And the question is, why have a church at all? That's the question. Why have a church at all? What's church's for? And I wanted to link that back to the reading I read right at the beginning where Jesus says, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it.

And why is church? Because that's what Jesus' project is. That's what his project is. To build his church. And he builds his church by calling in people who are not his people.

Like the lost shepherd going to get the lost sheep. And then he looks after those people and keeps them through thick and thin.

And he works on them to transform them slowly but surely from being sheep to being a bride. From being a spotty ugly bride to being a beautiful bride without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

And that's church. That's Jesus' wonderful, amazing project to build his church. And the question why elders fits in with that.

[27:05] Because they're part of this scheme. Okay, that's the bit that I meant to say. That makes sense? I should have said that right at the beginning because it needed to form our thinking. Anyway.

So let's go back now to 1 Timothy chapter 3. And I wanted to pick up in verse 2. The overseer must be all sorts of things.

But verse 2 says he must be didacticon. Able to teach. A teaching type. So that comes in later.

And in verse 4 it says he must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?

So I wanted to take that little bit to pieces. So taking it to pieces. His own household well he manages. And I'll come back to the word manage. And his children, it says.

[28:09] Now NIV says his children obey him. It's another word with an under thought. Falling into line. It's falling into line under his leadership as father.

And the word for respect is a word which means sort of reverence. And he says in verse 5. If anyone his own household not to manage knows. If he doesn't know how to manage his own family.

How the assembly of God will he take care of? So it puts a parallel between being a good father in a family and being a leader in the church.

So what are these words? To manage. Pro istimi. Meaning to stand before. Thus to preside.

[29:15] To preside over. However. He should stand before. In his family. And he stands before. In the church.

And the appropriate response from the family is the giving of respect. His children should respect him for doing that. And what is this caring for the church?

How can he take care of God's church? So that epimeno. To look upon so as to care. To look after. So the same thought. Is to manage his family. Or stand in front of the family. And he's to stand in front of the church. And to take care of the church.

So this NIV says management. Probably the authorised version says rule. I don't know. Meaning to take care of.

[30:15] And there's a parallel between the father of a family. And being an elder in the church of God. So let's look at chapter 5 verse 17.

So we've got another description coming up. What do they do? Well verse 17. The elders who direct the affairs of the church well.

Are worthy of double honour. Especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the scripture says. Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain. The worker deserves his wages.

Do not entertain an accusation against an elder. Unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those whose sin are to be rebuked publicly. So that the others may take warning. So let's just pick up on what they do here.

This is also the word to stand before. The elders who well stand before.

[31:13] So NIV says direct the affairs of the church well. Double respect are reckoned worthy. And very much those labouring in word and teaching.

It's interesting that he uses the word labouring. Because it's a hard work word. Like digging a trench. Laying bricks. And the thing that these elders labour in.

Is word and teaching. And he goes on to say. The worker deserves his wages. Presumably emphasising the value.

That is to be placed. On word and teaching ministry. Then there's the bit about. The accusation against an elder.

Which is worth noting while we're here. He says don't receive an accusation against an elder. Except upon two or three witnesses. The ones sinning reprove. So that the left over ones.

[32:12] Fear may be having. Isn't it a pity. That in the churches. Particularly the denominational churches. Where child abuse was found. That the way of dealing with it.

Was the exact opposite of this. The way of dealing with it. Was to hush it up. And send the offending minister. On to another church. To do the same thing somewhere else.

And what Paul is saying to Timothy. Is you certainly don't do that. If an elder sins. You rebuke them. Does it say publicly. It does.

So it's not to be hushed up. You to say. To get the evening Argus to come around. To say we're having a. South today. We are going to discipline this elder.

Because this is completely unacceptable. And we want everybody to know it's unacceptable. Want people in the church to know that. We want people in the ministry to know that.

[33:10] And we want people on the outside world. To know that. And of course that's exactly what didn't happen. Isn't it? The financial provision shows the value. Put on teaching word ministry.

And this word. Proestimi. Meaning to direct the affairs. Is much linked with word ministry. So what do they do? They manage the church like looking after a family.

They have caring and kindness and authority. Which leads to respect. They are watching and caring. Supporting and praying. Also saying no to people in various ways.

Authorized version says ruling. But we might say presiding. Managing. Leading. So the church needs to be led. And we need to all decide to do the same thing together.

So in the past. For example. We decided no longer to use the authorized version. As the version that would be read from. From the front. And that everybody would have in front of them.

[34:11] So that was a decision that needed. Managing and leading. And persuading. So that we could all be in agreement. With it. And back in the day.

When we wondered whether we would have. For example. A week of prayer. So that was a leadership thing. That's something we should do. Churches need strategic planning.

And thinking. Where should we send a ministry? What sort of ministry should we have? Churches need. To show. Be shown a way forward. If we gave such and such.

An amount of money. We could set up this. We could buy that. We could advance the kingdom. In such and such a way. These elders. Don't do it.

As if they were. The lords of the church. But with a servant heart. And it. The elders ought to be saying. This is how to live.

[35:05] This is how to love. And be exemplary. In that. The elders serve the congregation. By servant leading.

It's not the same thing. As serving. By taking orders. From the congregation. It's not the same thing. As doing that. Remember when I first started. One of the old ladies. In the church. Wanted to book me. As a taxi service.

She said. You're not doing very much. The church pays you. I'd like to go. So and so. Can you come and pick me up? And I thought. Oh I didn't realize. That was my job. And I. In the end. I said no.

I'm afraid I can't do that. I wouldn't mind doing it once. But I think it was going to be a regular.

My regular. Taxi run. I don't. I don't think I was. The elders. Are to make sacrifices. For the church.

[36:01] There's a style of. Churches dealing with elders. Actually make them into the sacrifice. And that's not. What's meant to be. The model of elder as punch bag.

So the person who is. Regularly complained about. Regularly criticized. Is not the model. In the New Testament. The churches.

The elders. Keep watch. Over. Souls. And have to give an account. And so. The elders. Ask. Themselves.

Together. And individually. Is. How's so and so getting on. Are they still praying. Are they serving. Are they following the Lord. And if not. What can be said and done. To put that right.

And the elders oversee. So. Taking a. Broad. Look. How is everyone. How is the work progressing. Who needs help. Who needs a kick. Who needs time and attention. Where are people at.

[36:55] It's an. Overseeing. Thing. Okay. So that was. What do they do. Now. Next question. How do they do it. How do they do it. Well.

Some things. Are solved. At business meetings. So. In Acts chapter 6. When some of the widows. Were being overlooked. The way to solve it. Wasn't. To pray about it.

I'm sure they did pray about it. But they had to get together. And talk about it. So there was a solution. At a business meeting. And it. It wasn't a free for all. Business meeting. Somebody. Called it.

And led it. And made sure everybody. Had a fair speech. And so on. And so on. So that's an important part. Of church life. Some progress is made. Via. Spiritual response.

Strategic consultation. And planning. So for example. Paul. And his companions. When they saw the vision. Of the man. Calling them to Macedonia. They got together. It says. They batted it over.

They.

[37:53] They tossed that thought about. And concluded. That the Lord. Was calling them to Macedonia. So there's. That aspect of church life. But. The.

Strong theme. Of how they do it. Is by. Word. Ministry. And I'd like to give. I think five. Reasons for saying.

That there's. This strong emphasis. On word ministry. So if we take the idea. Of a shepherd. The shepherd who. Gathers in the lost. Now you might not have.

Tried this. I think. That if you went out. To convert people. And bring them to church. By going out on London road. Rugby tackling them.

Grabbing them over your shoulder. Bringing them in here. I don't think. That that would. Actually achieve. An awful lot. Apart from. Probably. Your arrest.

[38:52] How do you get sheep. To come in. You. You evangelize them. You preach the gospel. To them. It's evangelism. How does the Lord. Guide. Wandering sheep.

By speaking. By speaking. By speaking to them. How are hungry sheep. Fed. By speaking. By building. Being built up.

Through the gospel. And the word of God. God. And I'm going to try. Not to jump straight. To preaching. I'm going to. Take another. Sunday.

Next. Next Sunday. Hopefully. We can elaborate on this. But I'm not going to. Jump straight. To the idea of. Preaching. Because that has. Thoughts. That aren't necessarily.

Bible thoughts. So let's just put that one. To one. Park that for a minute. Here are five arguments. To back up the theme. Of word ministry. So number one. We've already seen. The elder must be.

[39:45] Able to teach. You can't have elders. Who can't do that. Number two. Was Titus 1.9. Which we saw. Last week. Must hold fast.

To the trustworthy message. As it has been taught. So that he can. Encourage others. By sound doctrine. And refute. Those who. Oppose it. So that was.

The text that we looked at. Last time. And I. Commented. That. This word. To encourage. Me. It's quite a strong word.

Which means to motivate. To affect people. So that they do stuff. To encourage. By sound doctrine. And refute. So that's the ability. To contradict.

The wrong teaching. That's. Two out of five. Here's. The third. One. In Timothy. What does. When Paul speaks to Timothy.

[40:44] What does he say. Timothy. Should be doing. So. Chapter four. Verse nine. One.

Timothy. Four. Verse nine. This is a trustworthy. Saying. That deserves. Full acceptance. And for this. We labor. And strive. We have put our hope. In the living God. Who is the savior of all men. And especially those who believe. So just picking that. What's he. What's the. The leverage. Or the leverage. Of this text. He's saying.

God. Saves those who believe. And what do they believe. They believe. Trustworthy. Sayings. It's all to do.

With believing. A message. And when he gets to verse. Eleven. He says. How are you going to help. Your congregation. Timothy. Well he says.

[41:39] Command. And teach. These things. He's going to say. Don't let anyone look down on you. Because you're young. He was probably about 40. Set an example.

For the believers. In speech. In life. In love. In faith. In purity. So definitely. Live it out. And then he will say.

Until I come. Devote yourself. To the public reading. Of scripture. So make that a very important thing. The reading of scripture. And then he will say.

To preaching. That's the word for encourage. Actually. To encouraging people. To exhorting people. And to teaching.

That's the didascalia word. And he says. This is your gift. Don't neglect the gift. Which is given through you. Given to you. Through a prophetic message. When the body of elders. Laid their hands on you.

[42:33] Be diligent. In all these matters. If we come to. Now then. Where have I got to. Verse. 16. Watch. Your life. And doctrine.

Closely. What's Timothy supposed to do. How is he supposed to do it. He's supposed to do it. Through word ministry. Watch your life. And your doctrine. Your teaching. That's so important. That your teaching. Doesn't wander off. Or be off key. Or be. Duff. Or misguided. Or pointless. Watch your life.

And doctrine. Closely. And he says. Persevere in them. Because if you do. You will save. Both yourself. And your hearers. Which is a big promise. Isn't it? If you do this.

If you. Persevere. In these things. You save yourself. And you'll save your hearers. So that's an important thing. Let me just put in here.

[43:31] A little in brackets. In word ministry. There's a difference between. Commanding the word of God. And wisely advising.

With human wisdom. Let me just give you the difference. Between those things. So. Meditating on God's word. Is a command from God. That.

You have to do that. Elders are supposed to say to people. You must meditate on the word of God. And in our. Membership service. We promise one another. We'll do that.

Get up at seven o'clock. And read the Bible for 20 minutes. Is advice. That's. That's not.

A command. God says you must do that. God says you must meditate. On the word of God. How you do it. Well. There are. There's. There are wiser and more foolish. Methods of doing it.

[44:29] But. To say. Get up at seven o'clock. And read the Bible for 20 minutes. Is advice. Okay. See the difference. The elders. Can do those two things. To. Pin exactly something on people.

That's what God says. And to advise. And a very good way of doing this. Would be. Fourth. Thing. Paul's own method.

How did he. Shepherd. The flocks. That he was. Involved with. How did he do that. Acts. Chapter 20. Let's go back to what. Penny. Read to us.

And what does he say. That he did. Acts. 20. Verse. 20. What did I do.

Says Paul. I'm asking you. To look after the flock. What did I do. Well. I have not hesitated. He said. To. NIV. Says. Preach.

[45:33] Underlying word. To announce. And teach. I've got that in. My authorized version. I've not hesitated.

To preach anything. That would be helpful to you. But I've taught you. Publicly. And from house to house. I. Did word ministry. Says Paul. I. Announce things.

Things. And I taught things. And I. Did this. When I had a big group of people. And. Paul says. In the earlier part of this chapter.

Steve was reminding me earlier. He went on so long. That people fell asleep. And fell out of the window. So we haven't got quite as bad as that. This morning. Although it is quite a warm morning. Isn't it. And we're on the ground floor. So that's an extra. Help in something like that. But. You notice the variety of it. I taught you. When I had a group of you.

[46:27] And I went round. And we did Bible studies. Individually. That's. Sort of variety of word ministry. He says in verse 21. I have declared. To both Jews and Greeks.

I have thoroughly. Testified. That they must turn to God. In repentance. And have faith in the Lord Jesus. He says. That's the gospel. Isn't it. To testify thoroughly.

To turn to God. In repentance. And faith. And in verse 25. He says. I know that none of you. Among whom I have gone about. Preaching the kingdom. Will ever see me again.

Well what did you do Paul. I preached the kingdom. This is a word. Kereso. Which means. To come as a herald. And tell people.

For the first time. It's a sort of. Bringing good news thing. In my understanding of it. The emphasis on. The fact. You're telling people. Who haven't heard it. Whether you're telling them.

[47:20] One to one. Over a cup of coffee. Or whether you're telling them. In a large meeting. Where you can shout. I don't think. Is the issue. But the heralding. Here. Is telling people.

Who haven't heard it. Verse 27. I know that none of you. Among whom I have gone about. Sorry. Verse 27. I have not hesitated. To proclaim to you. The whole will of God.

So what's he been doing. He's been doing. All sorts of word ministry. Teaching. Announcing. Declaring. Testifying. Telling people.

Who never heard it before. And. And so on. And so on. When he gets to verse 32. He says. What does he. What does he. Into whose hands.

Does he put them. And the answer is. I put you. Into the hands of God. And. The message. Of his grace. Where does he think.

[48:17] They'll be safe. They'll be safe. In the hands of God. And. In the arms. Of the message. Of his grace. Interesting. That was number four.

My fifth argument. The. Couple of texts. There was. What Paul did. And how did Jesus. Do his good shepherding. So let me ask you a question.

See if you can. Answer this. The sower. Sowed. Something. In the parable. What was it that he sowed. The seed. Yep. And the seed.

Was. The seed was the word. How did he do his. Job. He sowed the word. Early chapters.

Of Mark's gospel. When surrounded. By medical cases. He slipped. Off. That should say. I don't know. He slipped away. Saying. Let's go to the surrounding villages.

[49:15] So that I can. Preach. Yeah. Preach. Because. Preach there. Because that's why I came. He says. What was Jesus's method.

Was. Word. Ministry. In the book of Revelation. There's a two-edged sword. Which comes. From. The mouth.

Of Jesus. In other words. It's his word. The sword of the spirit is. The word of God. How did God. Make the world.

By speaking. By speaking. It is the word of God. That is the. Instrument.

That is deployed. In the church of God. To do. The thing. That Jesus is doing. To build his church. So that the gates of hell.

[50:14] Don't prevail against it. So what do these people do? They further. And continue. The work of Jesus Christ. Winning the lost. Making his church.

Beautiful and mature. For him. Gathering the lost. Encouraging what is good. Rebuking what is amiss. Leading. Guiding. Feeding. Directing the affairs. Of the church. And how do they do it? Well they preside. There's a. A sense of. Like the word. Rule. Or presiding. Leading. Managing. That includes. Caring for individuals.

But there's a. The chief theme. Is the ministry. Of the word of God. And. When I was. Thinking about this. I found it.

What shall I say? Well. Challenging.

[51:09] I suppose. Disturbing. The work of. Eldership. So as Chris and I do this. I think we're. We're often thinking. What's going. What's on the agenda.

At the next elders and deacons meeting. And. How are we going to. Arrange such and such. And what's on the timetable. And things like that. But actually. To stand back and say. What is. What is the work of elders?

The answer is. That the work of the elders. Is. In the church of God. To further. The project. Of Jesus Christ. His project.

Is to save the lost. And make his church. A beautiful church. And he does that. Through his word. Through people. That's what I find. Rather incredible.

It's a sobering. An amazing thing. That the heavenly. Almighty. Savior. Uses ordinary. Faulty human beings. As the channels. And instruments. Of the divine word.

[52:04] To accomplish his. Glorious work. Of perfecting his church. That's what he's doing. We should pray. That no church. Should be without elders.

And godly elders. And godly leadership. We should pray for God. To send his servants. To serve in his churches. And that includes us. As we look forward. Into the future generations.

And to take. Encouragement from this. What's actually happening. Jesus is building his church. And he's building it. So that the gates of hell.

Won't overcome it. And I don't think I know everybody here. But I want to say. There is no. Better. Project. To be involved in. So if you've come along. And you've very patiently. Listened to all of this. And you thought. I'm actually. I hardly ever come to church. Don't really know what. It's all about. And it's very long. And what I say is. What we've been thinking of. Is. [53:00] Is the. The project. That God has. In his heart. That will last forever. To build a community. Of people. And to belong to that. Is the most precious thing. That there is. In this. On this earth. And if you're not part of it. Then make it your business. To get God to show you. How you can be part of it. Well. Amen. Thank you for your patience. I was in two minds. As to what to sing. We'll sing. Eight hundred and seventy nine.