

# Praying For Faithful Elders

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Hello, I'm John. I'm in the Christchurch Youth Group and also the Alameda Community Group.

So today's reading is from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 14, verses 21 to 23. And then also chapter 20, verses 17 to 38.

They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of the disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to their faith.

We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God, they said. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and with prayer and fasting committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

[ 1 : 17 ] From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them, You know how long I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia.

I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you, but have taught you publicly and from house to house.

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.

I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me. My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task that the Lord Jesus has given to me, the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace. Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you.

[ 2 : 40 ] For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flocks of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he brought with his own blood.

I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number, men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

So be on your guard. Remember that for three years I never stopped, warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions.

In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

[ 3 : 52 ] When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again.

Then they accompanied him to the ship. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning. Welcome to Christ Church. Glad to be worshiping with you this morning.

Thank you, John, for that scripture reading. You may have noticed we are finished with Luke's Gospel. Jonathan finished that last Sunday. And the plan is to move onward into the New Testament in the book of Philippians, Paul's letter to the church in Philippi.

But for the next three weeks starting today, we're going to be here briefly in the book of Acts. Next Sunday, Jonathan is going to preach from Acts chapter 9 on Paul's conversion. The week after that, he's going to preach from Acts chapter 16 on the origin story of the church in Philippi.

But for today, and especially in light of our congregational meeting that's coming up, mark your calendars. Next, next Sunday, May 18th. We're talking about church leadership today. All right? This office that the New Testament calls elders in the church.

[ 5 : 01 ] And our hope is that you'll have a better understanding of what a church elder is and that you'll join us in praying that God might raise up new shepherds in this church to help govern and lead alongside of Jonathan, myself, Karen, Wes, Bill, Jesus, Tonya, Lori, and Brian.

And especially with some of our elders that I just named about to take a sabbatical. This is something we're really praying for as a church and we want to get in the hearts and minds of our congregation.

So that's why we're all of a sudden in Acts chapter 14 and 20 today. We're here to talk about elders. And if that sounds super boring and irrelevant to you, honestly, it sounded super boring and irrelevant to me at first.

Because who gets excited, right, about talking about church polity and church governance, especially since most of you here probably never probably imagined yourself becoming an elder at any point in your life.

Probably never crossed your mind. You could probably think of like a billion other things you'd rather be than an elder in a church. Some of you here aren't even Christians. And so a teaching like this might seem super far from that Christianity 101, Christianity 102 that you might have hoped to hear today.

[ 6 : 11 ] I want to acknowledge all of that. But with all of that said, the way I want to frame this teaching on elders this morning is to ask this question. Wherever you are in your spiritual journey and however far, unrealistic, and unappealing the idea of being an elder might seem to you, the way I want to frame this is by asking the question, where do you see yourselves 5, 10, 20, 30 years from now?

Older, of course, but maybe not an elder. And I want you to think about that, though. Have you considered this question? Where do you see yourself 10, 20, 30, 40 years from now?

And, you know, someone just asked me this question recently. I was on a phone call two Fridays ago with a planning consultant from Fidelity, all right? And he was asking me the same question. How do you envision your most ideal future self and life?

And in that future, what do you plan to be giving your time and resources to? So that's my question for us this morning. And, you know, I know most of you in this congregation, this is a striver class congregation, all right?

You guys are highly educated, high achieving, highly driven people. So I know that most of you have thought about this question. Some of you probably journal about it every single day, right? But while I'm sure that most, many of you even, probably have a pretty concrete vision about who you want to become and where you see yourself in the next X number of years.

[ 7 : 36 ] While many of you know exactly where you want to be in your careers and in your relationships, in your marriages, in your parenting stages, in your finances, even in your relationships with God himself.

What I still wonder is have you considered where do you want to be, not just in your personal relationship with Christ, but where do you want to be? How do you envision yourself decades from now in your relationship to the bride of Christ, to the bride of Christ, the church?

Have you ever given thought to that question? What vision do you have of your future self as it relates to this body of people that Christ gave his life for, that he shed his blood for, purchased with his blood?

What vision do you have concerning your calling and contribution to this thing called the church and the fulfillment of our mission to make disciples of Jesus among the nations, teaching them to do everything that Jesus commanded them to do?

You know, whether or not you become an elder in a church, this is a question for all of us today. In the presence of God, who are we becoming? Where do we see ourselves in the years and decades to come, particularly as members in the body of Christ?

[ 8 : 42 ] So again, I know most of you have never entertained this idea of becoming an elder in the church, and certainly not anytime soon. But what if, what if the Holy Spirit is nudging you today to at the very least, at the very least, aspire to it?

No matter how long it takes, no matter if you ever receive such a calling, would you be willing to let God tug on your heart just a little bit today to aspire toward being an elder? Just as the Apostle Paul says, here is a trustworthy saying, whoever aspires to be an overseer or an elder, the words are interchangeable in the New Testament, so whoever aspires to be an elder, he says, desires a noble task.

This is a word from God to all of us this morning, even to the third to fifth graders who are here with us. Might God be stirring up within you an aspiration, a holy desire to be a leader in the church, to be an elder?

But now maybe you're just asking though, okay, well, what even is an elder, right? What does that entail? So let's just briefly and basically try to answer that question, what even is an elder? Turn with me to chapter 14 of the book of Acts, and let me point out a couple things here, okay?

So he's here, he's with these churches in Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, and although these churches came about by Paul and Barnabas' hard work, Paul and Barnabas, they fully recognize that this was a work of the Lord, that the Lord himself was going to sustain this work.

[ 10 : 06 ] So these churches and these people, they didn't belong to Paul and Barnabas, they belong to the Lord. And Paul and Barnabas had no illusion that these churches needed them to stick around as their leaders.

And this is a word for all of us, this is a word for me, it's a word for our lead pastor Jonathan and the rest of our elders, that Christ's church is not our own. God could very well call me or Jonathan or any of our elders away.

In fact, this week I got two emails, one telling me about a position in San Jose, another one inviting me to apply in Alameda. And just full disclosure, I love Christ's church, and Chelsea and I plan to raise our kids here.

But every opportunity that comes to our door, we submit in prayer to the Lord. And I do not presume that Christ's church is mine. And I do not presume that Christ's church needs me as a pastor here. And I think Paul and Barnabas, they totally understood that. They trusted the Lord with these baby church plants that God would continue the work even in their absence. And so they appointed other leaders. They entrusted elders.

[ 11 : 06 ] In the Greek, it's presbyterous. That's where we get Presbyterianism from. And that's what a presbyter is. A presbyter is an elder. And what Paul and Barnabas did was they entrusted these presbyters to lead these new church plants so that Paul and Barnabas could go and do the rest of the work that they were called to do elsewhere.

They understood the richness and the diversity and the plurality of the body of Christ. And that's the second thing I want you to notice here. Notice they appointed elders. It's plural. Elders in each church. So not one single dominant leader per church, but a plurality of elders.

In each church for accountability and balance and discernment. In a Presbyterian church. I'm just going to give you a little lesson on Presbyterianism today. A brief one, all right? In a Presbyterian church like ours, you should never find a church with a solo elder who is not held accountable by other elders.

And you should also never find a hierarchy amongst the elders. We don't, you know, all answer to Jonathan here or to some, you know, archbishop in another part of the country or to some pope. For Presbyterians, all the Presbyters, all the elders lead as equals. So Tonya, Bill, Jesus, Karen, Wes, Brian, and Lori, they all have the same vote, the same say as me and Jonathan.

[ 12 : 19 ] And not just in the local church, but at the denominational level as well. All right? So that's your little lesson on Presbyterianism. And if you have more questions on that, come to Belonging to Christ Church. Okay, June 1st, it's our lunch.

That's where you can bring all your questions about who we are and why we do what we do. I hope you'll make it to that if you're new. But that's what I want to say about Presbyterianism. All right? Another thing I really want us to notice is the process, though.

The process by which these elders were chosen. It wasn't a flippant or a pragmatic process. Look at what verse 23 says. It says this was a prayerfully discerned, spirit-led process.

It even involved fasting. Okay? And again, this is relevant for us coming into our congregational meeting on May 18th. We really want to encourage the members of our church here to be thinking and praying about who they might nominate to the office of elder at Christ Church.

Like I mentioned earlier, we would really love to see God raise up new leaders. Okay? We'd really love to see our church take this seriously and bring this before the Lord in prayer. Because remember what Jesus said when He saw all those crowds desperately flocking to Him?

[13:24] In Matthew chapter 9, when He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.

And if you pay attention to what He's saying, you know, He's saying is, you know, we don't have a harvest problem. The harvest, that's not the problem. We have a laborer problem.

And maybe even before that, we have a prayer problem. A prayer problem. So if you do anything in response to today's sermon, would you at least consider praying?

Praying for more laborers in the harvest. The harvest is plentiful. We see it. The harvest is so plentiful even today. Vanity Fair just put out an article, right? Christianity as the New Religion in Silicon Valley.

Barna Group Research confirming that more and more people are interested in relationships with Jesus. You have guys like David Brooks writing for the New York Times talking about the upsurge in religious interest.

[14:26] So at the very least, let's be praying. The harvest is plentiful. The laborers are few. Let's pray for that. You know, I think for a lot of us, we might view this elder nomination process as uninteresting and unimportant.

Maybe we aren't too concerned with whoever's chosen because we don't feel like you'll make much of a difference. We're pretty fine with how things are going in the church. And if things go poorly, we can just go to another church, right?

Maybe this just seems so small and insignificant compared to everything else that's going on in your life. I get it. But if I could just push back a little and say, this is not just about who becomes a leader in this little tiny church with a little tiny membership and a little tiny budget and a little tiny property here in Berkeley, California.

No, no matter the size of the church, we're talking about matters of the kingdom of God. And this is God's chosen and ordained means of uniting people to himself, uniting people to Jesus.

And history tells us that when this happens in a healthy and faithful way, this is how the world is changed. Think about the early church and the way that forgiveness and mercy and grace and compassion came to be valued by the entire Western world alongside hospitals and orphanages and abolition and the recognition of dignity in every human being, no matter what color or culture, including women and children and even the disabled, this is what this does when we make disciples faithfully and are led by faithful shepherds.

[15:58] And sure, yes, that was a work of the Holy Spirit, but it was the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the church led by faithful elders, spirit-filled elders. The appointing of elders is integral to the fabric of the Christian movement, a movement that has not only benefited you if you consider yourself a Christian today, but a movement that's changed the world far more than I think a lot of us are able to acknowledge.

And though you may not recognize it, listen, God has more He wants to do. God has more He wants to do through this church even, Christ Church, East Bay. And so who is leading our little church in this ultimate mission that God has given us?

This matters to God. And it matters for the good of every individual it touches. It matters for the good of the city and for the world. Faithful elders leading faithful churches is God's primary strategy for people meeting and being transformed by Jesus and living Holy Spirit-filled lives of love, justice, and peace that leave their mark on this world.

And there's a ton more that I would love to say, but let's move on from the what to how an elder is supposed to live and lead. Like, what should we be looking for in the leaders of our church, in these elders, and what should we be expecting them to do?

And so to that first question, I want to point you to the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul gives us the gold standard when he writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy 3, verse 1. He says, If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?

[ 17 : 53 ] He must not be a recent convert or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

Do you hear that? Okay, so these are, this is the divinely inspired criteria for an elder. Okay, and I want to make two observations about that long list. One, did you notice that the criteria has almost nothing to do with ability, but everything to do with character, right?

The only thing an elder must be able to do is they must be able to teach. But everything else is about their character. And that leads me to my second point, which is that if the primary criteria for elders is to have an upstanding character, then as followers of Christ, even if we don't aspire to the office of elder in the church, we still all ought to aspire to the Christ-like character of an elder.

This is how an elder is supposed to live, and really it's how we're all called to live. But also, see, an elder is more than just someone who lives righteously and faithfully.

An elder is a leader. And if there is a single word describing the kind of leader an elder is supposed to be, consistent across the New Testament, that word is that elders are shepherds of God's flock.

[ 19 : 17 ] Shepherds. And I don't want us to miss how interesting and unique this image is, because think about it. The church is the beloved people of God. This is the institution, the primary vehicle God has established to bless and liberate the nations.

And yet, the way He wants His leaders to lead this holy institution is not as strongmen, warriors, kings, tyrants, oligarchs, CEOs, innovative tech gurus, or even as holy men and women, but as shepherds.

As shepherds. Did you catch what he said, what Paul said in Acts chapter 20? As he's ending his missionary journey, this is his last word to these elders in the church of Ephesus. And he gathers them, and this is what he says to them in verse 28.

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

He calls on the elders to keep watch over themselves and their flocks as shepherds, see? And the apostle Peter, he would confirm this as well. Do you remember what Jesus said to him on that beach?

[ 20 : 24 ] Peter, do you love me? Then feed my sheep. And Peter goes and writes a whole letter about shepherding the flock. To the elders among you, he writes in 1 Peter chapter 5, This is why pastors are called pastors.

Pastor is the Latin word for shepherd. Lord. And notice also how Peter distinguishes a shepherd from other kinds of leaders. Shepherds of God's flock, as it says, they don't lord their authority over their flock.

No, they lead by example. They're servant leaders. They serve willingly. You know, I think so many of us hesitate when we think about authority in the church, right? Authority structures, especially those of us who have been wounded in the church by poor church leadership.

Many of us can even begin to despise and distrust the authority figures that God has established in the church. But what I want to say is that the problem isn't authority structures in the church or the establishment of elders.

The problem is authority gone wrong. Authority gone astray from the way of Jesus in the church. The problem is when church leaders forget that their authority, our authority, is derived from our ultimate good shepherd.

[ 21 : 49 ] The problem is when church authority figures, we claim the kind of authority that only belongs to Jesus. And when we don't shepherd the way Jesus did, with sacrifice and service.

So you see, yes, elders are called to lead the church with authority from God. But at the same time, just like our shepherd king, our elders exist in the church to serve and not be served.

My professor in seminary, his name was Tim Whitmer, he writes this book. We make all of our elders read it. It's called The Shepherd Leader. And what Dr. Whitmer boils this role of the shepherd down to is this.

Shepherds know their flock. Shepherds lead their flock. They feed their flock. And they defend their flock. They know, lead, feed, and defend. That's what we're looking for in faithful elders.

Faithful shepherds who will know and call their sheep by name, right? Who lead out of relational capital. Who lead out of connection and who do not presume upon their authoritative status in the church.

[ 22 : 47 ] That's why Paul here, in verses 18 to 34, he keeps saying, you know me. You saw me. We lived together. You saw how hard I worked. You saw how I suffered for you. How I gave. How I poured myself out for you.

You know me. And so will you follow me? You know you can trust me. Faithful elders also lead their sheep, right? They lead them toward greener pastures and fresher waters.

They lead them into deeper relationships with Christ. Leaders go first. That's what shepherds do.

They take risk. They take responsibility. They also feed their sheep.

The heart of a shepherd is for our sheep to be nourished. That's why Paul says, I didn't hesitate to preach anything that would be helpful to you. Even when I was threatened for it, even when I had to preach a message, an unpopular message of repentance, an exclusive message that Jesus Christ alone is Lord, they insist on feeding their sheep with the truths of God.

And then finally, faithful shepherds, they defend their flocks. They push back against the counterformation of our world. They fight against the wolves who would come into our church and tear us apart and pull us away from Christ.

[ 23 : 57 ] They say, no, I'm not going to stand for that. A faithful shepherd knows, leads, feeds, and defends their sheep. Now, maybe this sounds even more unappealing to you after hearing what an elder is, right?

I don't want to know, lead, feed, and defend sheep. I don't want this extra responsibility. But what if the posture of our hearts isn't meant to be, God, give me less responsibility for my weak back and narrow shoulders.

But God, give me broader shoulders and a stronger back for all that you want to do in and through me. Like, why would we ask for less when God wants us to have more?

Why wouldn't we want God to grow our capacity and our hearts to shepherd those we're called to shepherd? And sure, maybe you don't see yourself as an elder in 5 years, 10 years, 20 years, even in 30 years.

Well, how about aspiring to it for the rest of your life? Not worrying about when that time may come or if it ever comes, but seeking for the rest of your life the kind of character and capacity of a shepherd.

[ 25 : 13 ] Simply seeking to be used by God as a blessing to the church. This is the heart of God. This is the heart of God for the world.

God's heart bleeds for the shepherdlessness that exists in the world. Remember again, Jesus in Matthew chapter 9, going through the crowds, teaching, preaching, proclaiming the kingdom, casting out demons, healing the sick, seeing the people, he felt compassion for them because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.

Did you hear that? In the eyes of Jesus, the problem that he sees with the world, as desperate people flock to him, the problem is not that they are lacking education, money, technology, or even goodwill and love.

No, the problem that he sees is that they are lacking shepherds. And this is God's heart for the world, shepherds for his sheep. And if we are followers of Christ, beholding Christ as our ultimate good shepherd, whether or not we ever officially become ordained as elders in the church, how can we not share the same shepherd heart?

How can we not want to cultivate and imitate the heart of our good shepherd? Knowing, leading, feeding, and defending the people of God aren't exclusive activities reserved only for the ordained, only for people who wear collars like mine.

[ 26 : 31 ] It's what the children of the good shepherd love and long to do in a healthy and vibrant church. You see, the church, this church, Christ's church, does not exist to create a religious product just for sheep to consume.

We are a failure of a church if all we are is a place for people to just comfortably show up. No, Christ's church exists. Why? To lead people into deeper relationships with Christ and his church through community and for the city.

Christ's church exists to make disciples who make disciples who make disciples who know, lead, feed, and defend the body of Christ with the heart of their good shepherd. And so, to be a disciple of

Jesus who is not a disciple maker who makes disciple makers, who makes disciple makers, is short of who God wants and intends for us to be.

Jesus' heart for his sheep is that they become shepherds and join the plentiful harvest. And so again, my question is, can you envision that for yourself?

Where do you see yourself decades from now with regard to this calling? Because I want you to know that even if you cannot envision this for yourself, God can.

[ 27 : 46 ] This is God's vision for you. Even the third, fourth, and fifth graders here, even the youth here, who think of this, who think of your faith, who think of your stage right now, is I'm just trying to be a Christian who can get through Pastor Andrew's long and boring sermons.

Maybe that's how you understand who you are as a Christian today. But what if this is just the beginning of your aspiration and journey toward being an elder in the church one day?

Toward being used of God to do something beautiful, mighty, and noble. If I could be so bold as even to prophesy this, Lord, let it be in our church. Lord, do far more through these children than any of us could imagine.

Because that's God's heart. That's the heart of our shepherd. Lord, deliver us, right? Deliver our children from the demonic powers of complacency and lukewarm 1.5 hours a week Christianity. Honestly, for way too many Christians, we can have this subconscious vision of ourselves. Three, four, five decades out. And in that vision, our involvement with the church, our sense of responsibility for God's people, it's really, it's hardly changed from today.

[ 29 : 02 ] And you might not say it so brazenly and explicitly, but it's basically true in your hearts. Like maybe your nest egg is bigger and you're able to give to the church a little bit more. Maybe your time is a little bit more free and you're able to volunteer like once a month, finally.

Your kids are out of school. Your mortgage is paid. Your business is built. Your empire is built. Your tenure is complete. Your 401k is secure. And you have these extra trips to Hawaii. But really in your hearts, in your subconscious, you've muttered to yourself quite contentedly, you know who I am today in 2025?

This is pretty much as much like my good shepherd as I ever planned to be. And I'm not trying to guilt you. Like, hey, God wants more from you.

You owe Him. Well, that's true. It's true. He does and you do. But no, my shepherd heart for this church is less about what God wants from you and far more about what God wants for you and for us and for the world.

I'm not up here, a shepherd, trying to squeeze more wool out of my sheep. That doesn't even make sense, but you know what I mean. No, I'm pleading with you as a shepherd to his sheep, inviting you to be more than sheep, inviting you to join me in this honorable, life-giving, Christ-like experience of being a shepherd after the pattern of our Lord, our Lord whose insides groan for more shepherds in this broken world, full of ignored, misled, misfed, and lonely, undefended, straying sheep, straying to their own slaughter.

[ 30 : 37 ] This is not a call to gain a following and be an influencer like a YouTuber or an Instagrammer or some deluded cult leader. It's a call to shepherd people toward their ultimate shepherd, the one who ensures that they shall not want, the one who leads them to green pastures and still waters, the one who restores their souls, prepares a table before them, anoints their heads with oil, makes their cups overflow, and follows them all the days of their life with love and mercy.

It's the call to become more and more like the good shepherd who leaves the 99 for the one, even carrying the stray sheep on his shoulders, even carrying a cross on his shoulders. This is the good shepherd who laid his life down for us, who went to battle for us against death, not only as our shepherd, but as our sacrificial lamb and risen shepherd king.

So maybe you've never thought about being an elder in your entire life, but how do you envision yourself decades from now? Have you spent those decades, as you view yourself, have you spent those decades growing closer and closer every year in the likeness of your good shepherd and in your love for the flock of God?

You know, a couple Fridays ago when I was on that call with my planning consultant at Fidelity, and he was asking me, where do you see yourself in 20 years?

How do you envision how you want to spend your retirement? Full disclosure, this is what I said to him. You know, I would really like to be pretty close to financial independence in my 60s.

[ 32 : 15 ] And you have to think, wow, that's pretty early. I'm 37, that's less than two dozen years left. It's pretty early, right? Especially making a pastor's salary, right? And you might think, why does

Andrew want to be so close to financial independence in his 60s, right?

And it's not because I don't want to pastor anymore. I intend to pastor. I intend to shepherd. I intend to shepherd and be an elder for the rest of my life. But I would also love to get to a certain point of financial freedom where I could do that in a different way.

I've been following this pastor or this author, and he writes about the stages of a young man's life.

He says, you know, ideally you have this young boy who is beloved as a child.

And then he moves on, and he's nurtured in the faith, and he moves on to become like a cowboy or a ranger, exploring his faith, asking his questions, kicking the tires, just getting familiar with it.

And maybe in his 20s, he finally finds something that he feels is worth living for, fighting for, and dying for. He becomes a warrior. And then as a warrior, though, he progresses and he becomes a lover.

[ 33 : 30 ] He's not just tough and fighting for what he believes in, but he also knows how to be gentle and humble and loving. And I feel like I'm in that stage right now. I'm a warrior learning to be a lover, and into my 40s, I'm trying to learn how to be a king, how to have people under me flourish, how to build institutions that last.

But you know what I want to be in my 60s? I want to be a sage. I want to be in a place where I've been so formed by the Holy Spirit, where I've walked with Jesus so long, and I've had so many decades of intimacy with him, that I can pour myself out financially, with my time, with my wisdom. I want to be oozing with godliness, oozing with the Holy Spirit, not dependent on the church for my salary anymore, ready to give myself as a shepherd to the church.

And I would ask you, like, have you thought about your life in that way? Where do you want to be 20, 30 years out? Are you content to be a warrior for the rest of your life? Do you not want to be a king? Do you not want to be a sage?

God wants so much more for us. And he can do it. He will do it. And so I'm just asking you, I'm inviting you, will you follow me as I follow Christ and pursue this heart of a shepherd?

[ 34 : 53 ] Again, as Paul said, here is a trustworthy saying. Whoever aspires to be an elder truly desires a good, beautiful, and noble task.

It's the task of Jesus, our good shepherd. Let's pray. Lord, may it be so in our church.

Would you destroy the spirit of contentment and complacency? And would we strive hard after you, pursuing deeper intimacy with you, pursuing more responsibility and leadership?

For the sake of the church, for the sake of the world, oh God, build your church and use your shepherds and stir up in us the heart of our good shepherd, Jesus Christ.

In his name we pray. Amen.