

The Beginning of Church Life - Part 4

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[0 : 01] I believe all of us have at one time or another met people whose lives appear to be without problem or difficulty. But even when it appears that a person's life is without problems and difficulties, I think we all know that when we live in a fallen world, we face trials and difficulties, we face problems.

And so the truth is, even though it is not seen in a person's life, everyone and everything in this fallen world is affected by sin and affected by the disobedience of Adam.

And so if we get to know people long enough and well enough, we'll find this to be true. We all experience the effects of living in a fallen world.

And what is true about people is also true about churches. Churches are made up of fallen people living in a fallen world.

And so no matter how things appear, there is no church without problems or difficulties. If you get to know a church long enough and well enough, you'll find many problems and difficulties to one degree or another.

[1 : 27] That's all a part of the reality of living in a fallen world. And so this morning, as we conclude this four-part sermon series in the book of Acts, I think we're going to see the early church from a different angle than we have seen in the first three sermons so far.

The first three sermons covered chapters one and two of the book of Acts. And we saw a powerful church growing with committed members who loved God and loved each other.

And we saw a church that was marked by the fear of the Lord and by signs and wonders being done through the hands of the apostles. And we saw a church that had favor with God and with all of the people.

And these wonderful glorious days continue into chapter three. But when we come to chapter four in the book of Acts, things begin to change. Starting in chapter four, we see that Peter and John were speaking in the temple.

And the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees arrested them because they were preaching that Jesus rose from the dead. And thereby preaching the resurrection of the dead.

[2 : 48] And the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. And then we come to chapter five and we see the shocking deception and the death of Ananias and Sapphira.

And now it is very clear that this early church was not a perfect church. It was not a church without problems. Problems. This morning as we conclude this four-part series, I want to look at the role of leaders in the early church in times of crisis and change.

And the approach that I'll be taking this morning is to use what I would call three case studies of three particular incidents that took place in the early church.

And it's my hope that as we consider these three case studies from the early church, it'll help to solidify our own thinking about the role of elders in the local church.

So the first one of these case studies is found in Acts chapter 6. So if you would turn there, we'd be reading verses 1 through 6.

[4 : 04] Acts chapter 6, verses 1 through 6. And I'm reading from the English Standard Version. Acts 6, starting in verse 1.

Now in these days, when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

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.

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.

[5 : 12] And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip and Prochorus and Nicanor, excuse me, and Timon and Parmenas and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch.

These they set before the apostles and they prayed and laid their hands on them. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you that we're able to gather this morning in this place to worship your holy name.

We ask now that as we sit under the instruction of your word that you would speak to our hearts in ways that only you can. Would you give us heirs to hear and hearts to obey in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Now I want to begin by making a foundational statement which I'll be seeking to support from Scripture. And the statement is this. Even in times of crisis and change, the role of church leaders remains the same.

Even in times of crisis and change, the role of church leaders remain the same. And so whatever the nature of the crisis or the change, whether it's planned, meaning it's something internal, over which there perhaps is some control, or whether it is imposed, meaning it's something that's external and you really don't have the control over it, the role of church leaders does not change.

[6 : 54] And I think it's so important because there are people who would argue that it should change. The role remains what it always was, even in the absence of crisis and change.

So this text that we have just read gives us some insight into what church life was like in the early church. Verse 1 tells us that the number of the disciples were increasing in number.

But in the very same verse, we see a problem. And the nature of the problem is that the Hellenists, the Greek-speaking Jews, were complaining against the Hebrews, the Aramaic-speaking Jews, that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food.

And what should be clear to us is that church growth and church problems tend to go hand in hand. But here we see that not only was the church growing, the church was also changing.

It's no longer purely Hebrew, Aramaic-speaking church. We see that some who later joined the church were Jews from the dispersion, Jews who had been dispersed out of Palestine.

[8 : 20] And they lived elsewhere and they picked up the Greek language. And these parents obviously had relaxed their Jewish customs so much so that their children did not speak the Hebrew language.

And these Greeks were complaining that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. Now when you consider this though, the dispute seemed to be about more than just food. The issue, the root issue, seemed to be prejudice. The Hellenists, these Greek-speaking Jews, were saying, hey, how is it and why is it that it is our widows who are being overlooked in the daily distribution of food?

Somehow the Hebrew widows were being taken care of, but the Hellenist widows are not being taken care of. And in verse 2, Luke tells us that the complaint came to the apostles and they called a church-wide meeting.

And so the apostles summoned the full number of the disciples. We see that in verses 2 and 3. And essentially, they tell them three things.

[9 : 36] First, we see in verse 2, the apostles said, it is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Now it's interesting because this statement seems to be in direct response to an expectation of the Hellenists that the apostles would take this on directly, that they would handle this problem.

They felt that the best way to deal with this unfair distribution of food is for the apostles to handle it themselves. And I believe this is the reason that the apostles, first of all, said, it is not right that we should leave ministering the word of God to serve tables.

Now you have to admit that it took some courage to say to people who felt so strongly that they were being handled unfairly and that you're the solution to the problem, that you're not going to do it the way they expect you to do it.

That's the first thing they tell them. We're not going to do it. We're going to continue to preach the word. And then second, they say to the disciples, we see this in verse 3, that although they're not going to do it, they've thought about a plan as to how to do it.

And what they said, the plan was, choose from among yourselves seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and we'll appoint them to the task. So we see that the apostles thought about the problem, they declined doing it themselves, but they said, here's how we're going to do it.

[11:13] And then they thought about what was needed because they decided that it should be seven men. That would be sufficient. They didn't decide on five or they didn't decide on ten.

They felt it was seven. And we see the thought that they put into it that seven men were able to handle this. And then they also thought that it was best for the people to choose the men as opposed to them choosing the men.

They said, you choose them, we'll appoint them. They thought about it because they also didn't leave it up to the people to choose whomever. They said, these are the qualifications.

They must be fitting these particular qualifications. They had to have a good reputation. They had to be full of the Spirit.

And this means more than speaking in tongues. They had to be full of wisdom. And this is not worldly wisdom. This is godly wisdom. This is just to serve tables.

[12:17] And then the apostles would appoint them indicating that they would be accountable to the apostles not to the people.

And then the third thing that the apostles say to them is that we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

It's a very insightful part of the early church. It's very instructive for us. And let me just take a couple of minutes and say something about male and female deacons.

There are churches that take a different view on this. There are some churches that believe that deacons should only be males and there are some churches that would hold that you can have female deacons as well.

Both are permitted in sovereign grace churches. There are some sovereign grace churches that have only male deacons and there are some that have male and female deacons. Our view, the oldest view here at Kingdom Life is that we believe that both women and men are able to serve as deacons so long as the functions are consistent with what Scripture allows.

[13:34] And that would be the view of sovereign grace. There are some particular functions things that when you have female deacons that you'd want to ensure that you do not cause them to function in and that would be things like putting them in an authoritative teaching role over men.

But the office of deacon is a serving office. It's not a governing office. It is an office to serve and not to govern.

Now, I believe that this task that they had, this task of distributing food, that probably played into why the disciples, why the apostles, sorry, told them that they were to choose men.

Just the nature of the task. It was no doubt a very difficult and strenuous task that men were certainly more suited for. And also, we should know that a lot of churches have taken this very legalistically and they have seven deacons.

It doesn't matter. They get seven deacons and they are men. And I don't think that seven is a magic number. I think that was the number that they used because it suited the situation that they had.

[14:57] A church today can choose less deacons or more deacons based on what their needs are. And as I've said, there are some roles that women would be far more suited to play than for men.

And also, it doesn't mean that the members of the church have to always nominate the deacons. They may do that and that is not necessarily the case.

Sometimes they do so. Sometimes they don't do so. Now moving on, one of the other interesting things about this account is that these seven men who were selected, they all interestingly had Greek names.

And possibly, not necessarily, but possibly they were Hellenists themselves. So you have a Hellenist problem and possibly these were Hellenists who were appointed to solve the problem. And the apostles evidently had no problem with that and they commissioned them into their ministries. Now look at what verse 7 says. Verse 7 says, And the word of God continued to increase and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

[16 : 24] that was the result of the apostles leading with wisdom in a particular situation. The result was the church wasn't divided.

The riddles were not being uncared for. The word of God continued to increase. The number of the disciples continued to multiply greatly in Jerusalem.

This case study is really the first recorded crisis that we find in the early church due to growth of the church.

And while there are many lessons that can be learned from it, there's one particular lesson that I want us to see this morning. The overarching lesson for pastors is this.

When faced with any kind of crisis or change in the church, pastors are to do whatever they need to do in order to, number one, guard their priorities.

[17 : 31] That's the overarching lesson that I think we should learn from this crisis that was brought to the apostles that they were expected to deal with themselves to ensure fairness in the distribution of the food.

They guarded their priorities. And the biblical priorities of pastors are prayer and the word. But I think that not only is there a lesson in this for pastors, there's a lesson in this for church members as well.

And that lesson is that church members should help their pastors to guard their priorities. And I think first and foremost this can be done by praying for them.

Praying for them that in the midst of all kinds of competing demands that they would guard their priorities. That those priorities would be guarded so that when we gather at a time like this this morning that the word of God can be brought to the people of God.

But it can also be done through church members being willing to take some of the load off of pastors, load that they don't need to carry so that they can give themselves to prayer and the word.

[18 : 47] And that's the way that deacons in particular serve in carrying out certain ministry duties and responsibilities that would otherwise occupy the attention and time of pastors.

And then it's also done by accepting changes, by accepting decisions that are designed to help pastors guard their priorities.

Regrettably, in so many churches today, pastors, the senior pastors, expected to function like a CEO, and the other pastors are to function like company executives.

And sadly, in some churches, they even call members customers. pastors. And so in seasons of change, no matter what the issue is, each time pastors are looked to as the solution or to provide the solution or to have some active involvement.

But the truth is, pastors and elders really only need to be involved to the extent that their leadership is required and to the extent that their involvement does not take them away from the priorities of prayer and the word.

[20 : 08] And so the apostles led the early church through growing pain, but they managed and maintained their priorities. Over several months, David and I have been prayerfully giving thought to the appointment of deacons and deaconesses here at Kingdom Life.

some people already serving during the work of deacons and deaconesses, even though they have not been appointed as such.

And just this past Thursday, we met and spoke about what we were thinking in final ways. And so this week, I will be speaking with several of you, asking you to consider serving as deacons and deaconesses in our midst.

And as we go into our week of corporate consecration, our prayer is that you would take that time to really seek the Lord and consider serving in a formal way in the offices of deacons and deaconesses.

Well, that's the first case study on crisis and change. The second one is found in Acts chapter 13, verses 1 through 3. Acts 13, 1 through 3.

[21 : 31] And it deals with leading through change. Acts 13 is about the midpoint of the book of Acts. The book has 28 chapters and chapter 14 is actually the midpoint, but 13 is roughly the middle of the book as well.

And what is clear as you follow through in the book of Acts, it is clear that by Acts 13, spiritual change is taking place in the early church. In a sense, it begins in chapter 6.

It begins with the choosing of these seven deacons to serve the poor widows. Stephen is one of the seven deacons, and in chapter 7, we are introduced to Stephen, his life.

and then in chapter 8, we are introduced to a man by the name of Saul, and we're told how he persecuted the church.

And in chapter 8, we're told that as a result of Saul's persecution against the church, the disciples were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. And in chapter 8, we read that Philip, one of the seven deacons, went to Samaria and preached, and many people believed.

[22 : 51] And this was an absolutely shocking thing in the church. It was shocking that these Samaritans with whom Jews had no relationships, they were now being saved and coming in to the church.

In chapter 9, we read how the Lord converted the apostle Paul, who at the time was Saul, and commissioned him as an apostle to the Gentiles. And then in chapter 10, we have the account of Peter going into the home of Cornelius, a Gentile, and how Cornelius and his whole household were saved.

Again, more Gentiles coming into the church. And then in chapter 11, the whole chapter is about the criticism that the Jews brought against Peter for going to Cornelius' house.

And then by the end of chapter 11, we have this account of how the church in Antioch came about. It didn't come about through Jews.

We're told that when the Jews were scattered abroad, they didn't speak to anyone except Jews. They refused to speak to the Samaritans. It took some men from Cyprus and Cyrene to begin to preach the gospel to the Samaritans.

[24 : 09] And many of the Samaritans believed. And they, they, they, sorry, in Antioch, they were, they were preaching. when the, when the Jews were scattered abroad, they did not preach in Antioch.

They, they refused to, to preach. They, they didn't like Gentiles. It helps us to see how sometimes when we've come to Christ, there, there are still embedded patterns of sin in us.

And, and prejudice and racism is, is one of those things. And we see that with the Jews, how they refused to preach to others. And so some Gentiles from Cyprus and Cyrene, they ran to Antioch and they preached to the Hellenists who were there.

They preached to these Greeks who were there, these Greek speaking Jews, and they turned to the Lord. And so the report goes back to Jerusalem that these people, these Gentiles in Antioch were coming to Christ.

And so the apostles sent Barnabas to see if it was legitimate, to see if they really were saved. And what Luke tells us is that when Barnabas came, this is what Luke says, when Barnabas went, he saw the grace of God.

[25 : 32] In other words, Barnabas could not deny the conversion of the people in Antioch because he saw the grace of God at work in their lives. In other words, the salvation they received brought fruit in their lives.

He saw it. The Bible says he saw the grace of God and he was glad. And he urged them to remain faithful to the Lord and to be steadfast in their purpose.

And the Bible says more people as a result of Barnabas coming were added to the Lord. And so Barnabas, what Barnabas does is Barnabas knows he's not going to get any support from Jerusalem because they're prejudiced, they're racist.

And he goes and he looks for this man, this kind of outcast who they didn't trust in Jerusalem. They went and he looked for Saul of Tarsus and he brought him to Antioch.

And we're told that for a whole year, Barnabas and Saul taught the people. And many people came to Christ. And we're told that the first place that people were called Christians was at Antioch.

[26 : 38] it's the first place in the Bible that people were called Christians because of the ministry of Barnabas and Saul. And then in chapter 12 we have the account of the execution of James and the imprisonment of Peter and then we come to chapter 13.

I wanted you to see how we arrive at chapter 13. So chapter 13, our second case study starting in verse 1. Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manan, a lifelong friend of Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then after fasting and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Now in light of all that had transpired, the leaders at Antioch no doubt saw that something was happening, there was a change that was taking place in the church.

It was no doubt very clear that the same way God used Jerusalem, he was now using Antioch. But what do we see the leaders in Antioch doing?

[28 : 14] I mean, humanly speaking, this is a lot to make you proud. It's a lot to make you proud that the same thing you see happening in Jerusalem, as a matter of fact, it wasn't happening to that degree anymore.

There was a shift now taking place over to Antioch. but what we see them doing is we don't see them gloating and saying that they're the best act in town and that Jerusalem is passé.

We see them instead fasting and worshiping the Lord. And it was during this time of fasting and prayer that the Lord gave them prophetic direction and told them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work he had called them to do.

Now we don't know how the Spirit spoke. Maybe he spoke through one of them. But the Spirit spoke and they knew that he spoke.

They knew that the Spirit spoke. But when you think about it, this sending off of Barnabas and Saul was not a natural thing to do. A lot of times when we say that we are seeking the Lord, we can so easily be seeking the Lord about what we want to do.

[29 : 28] Not about what we need to do or what he would have us to do. We can seek the Lord about what we want to do. And I can easily see how they could have been seeking the Lord about what he wants to do with Barnabas and Saul in Antioch, how they could probably expand and do all sorts of other things.

But they didn't do that. They obviously were open to the Lord. And the Lord tells them, send out Barnabas and Saul.

In other words, almost send out the two men who were the catalyst for the big revival that took place in Antioch. That's counter intuitive.

We tend not to do that. We tend to hold things like that very tight-fistedly. We tend to want to hold on to it, but the Lord says, no, send them out. in a time of prayer and fasting, they heard the Lord tell them to do something that was not a natural, instinctive thing to do.

And so what's the lesson from this case study? Well, simply, but profoundly, it is this, seek the Lord.

[30 : 43] that is what leaders are to do in times of change and in times when it is clear that something is happening, rather than just go with what our eyes see and work with that, we need to seek the Lord.

And the Lord promises that if we seek Him, we will find Him. And when we find Him, we are to hear from Him and we are then duty-bound to obey Him.

And so when the elders of this church are making changes, a legitimate question to ask is, have you sought the Lord?

It's a legitimate question for anyone to ask of us. Have you sought the Lord on this? And my prayer is every time we would be able to sincerely say, yes, we have, and we believe this is what the Lord is saying to us.

One of the easiest ways to go astray is to be guided by what our eyes see. And the leaders in the church in Antioch would have been led astray had they been guided by what their eyes saw.

[31 : 57] The natural thing would have been to keep Barnabas and Saul. But the Lord says, no, let them go, send them off to the work I've called them to do, and that is what they did.

We now come to the third and final case study which is found in Acts 15. And it is actually connected to Acts 13. And the reason it's connected to Acts 13 is that the racist issue, this issue of prejudice comes to a head in Acts 15.

This was such a big issue that it resulted in the first recorded council of the church, times when all the churches would come together and they would convene to address particular issues of theology and practice.

And the first one recorded in scripture is in Acts 15 and it really had to do with race. Theology seems to be the presenting issue but it really had to do with being Jewish or non-Jewish.

So let's read beginning in verse 1, 1 through 21, Acts chapter 15. It says, but some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

[33 : 36] And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Barnabas, Paul and Barnabas, and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

And so being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles and brought great joy to all the brothers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them.

But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, it is necessary to circumcise them and order them to keep the law of Moses.

The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter rose up and said to them, brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

[34 : 59] And God who knows the heart wore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us. And he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.

Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our forefathers nor we have been able to bear.

But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus just as they will. And all the assembly fell silent and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

And they finished speaking. After they finished speaking, James replied, brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name. And with these words of the prophets, and with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, after this I will return and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen.

[36 : 21] I will rebuild its ruins. and I will restore it. And the remnant of mankind, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known of old.

Therefore, my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but we should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols and from sexual immorality and from what has been strangled and from blood.

For from ancient generations, Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he has read every Sabbath in the synagogues.

So here we see that the church was divided on this issue of salvation along ethnic lines. There were those like Paul and Barnabas and Peter who were saying that salvation was through grace.

Others were saying, no, it's necessary to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses because if they don't do that, you cannot be saved. And after the testimonies of Peter and Barnabas and Paul, the issue was settled by James.

[37 : 53] And how did James settle it? James settled it by appealing to Scripture and he reminded them that what was happening was prophesied long ago and he quoted Amos 9, 11 through 12.

And on this basis they sent a letter to the Gentile churches and we read later on, says that they were encouraged when they read the letter. Their hearts were strengthened when they read the letter.

Their faith was settled when they read the letter because there were people telling them contrary things and conflicting things and so their faith was unsettled. But when they sent the letter they were encouraged and they were settled in their faith in God.

So what's the third lesson to be drawn from this third case study? The third lesson is that we are to be guided by Scripture.

We are to be guided by Scripture. And I'm missing a page. We are to be guided by Scripture.

[39 : 07] That is the way that this issue was finally settled in the church. Scripture has to be our guide.

It can't be what is pragmatic or what is idealistic or what the majority might want. It must be that at the end of the day we are seeking to be guided by Scripture.

And brothers and sisters I would rather any day to be making the attempt to be guided by Scripture maybe misunderstanding the Scripture but at least there is this noble attempt to allow Scripture to

guide us.

We must be people who are guided by Scripture and who are tethered to Scripture. Scripture.

Recently I saw a short documentary by the New Yorker on Rob Bell entitled Hellraiser.

Rob Bell is the former pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Michigan and Rob Bell is a heretic. Rob Bell is someone who has turned away from the faith and has denied the very essentials of the Christian faith and questioned things like the virgin birth, questioned the reality of hell.

[40 : 40] And as he did so, thankfully people left. the church went from being a church over some 13,000 dwindled down to some 3,000 because people left.

And in the video one of the encouraging parts of it for me as I watched it is he was talking about how as he was preaching these novel things, people were leaving the church.

And he said that there was this one family, a very prominent family, a very wealthy family, came to him and they were telling him that they were leaving the church. And he said to them, why, why, why are you leaving?

And he said they looked him straight in the eye and they said, because we read our Bibles. And he was saying it for a different reason. He was trying to say it from the point of view that they were saying they knew the Bible better than him, the pastor.

In other words, he was trying to say they shouldn't, know their Bibles at all and they should just depend on all that he said. But I was encouraged by that. Because they weren't leaving because they felt pressured by other people.

[41 : 58] They weren't leaving because of what family members were saying. They told him, we're leaving because we read our Bibles and what you're saying is contrary to Scripture. And see, brothers and sisters, when fidelity fails in the pulpit, the defense is in the pew.

When pastors cease to be faithful to the Word of God, the protection needs to be in the pew. The protection needs to be in the people of God who know their Bibles enough to challenge and to question things that are contrary to Scripture.

We need to open the pages of the book. And this is not just a leadership responsibility to be guided by Scripture. We are all to be guided by Scripture. The Bible tells us that the Word of Christ is to dwell in us richly and that we are to admonish and to encourage one another on a daily basis.

And this is so important because when a church ceases to be guided by Scripture, it really ceases to be a church. It is something else, but not a church.

And we must not mistake that every group of people who gather on a Sunday morning or on a Saturday necessarily is a church.

[43 : 30] Scripture tells us that there are false churches and so we should not automatically assume that all churches are true churches, but one of the marks of a true church is that that church is guided by Scripture.

And so these issues, questions that may come up, we want to be guided by Scripture. We want to be saying, what does the Word of God have to say about that?

Whatever the topic may be, whatever the issue may be, God has not left us to ourselves. He has given us His Word and we are able to look to His Word for guidance and for direction and for instruction.

The Bible says that the man of God will be thoroughly furnished by the Word of God. And Scripture is reliable to be able to do that. So at all times, churches, church leaders are to guard their priorities. Let us seek the Lord and not just go on their own site and wisdom and understanding. And most of all, they need to be guided by Scripture. And the reason that this is so important, that's the reason that this is so important.

[44 : 54] The reason this is so important for church leaders is that they have been entrusted with the church of God. They've been entrusted with the church of God, which he obtained by his own blood.

And they will one day stand before God and give an account for those whom God has entrusted to them.

They will give an account for them. And those for whom God has given his own blood, they are worth giving oneself to the priorities of preaching the word of God and prayer.

They are worth seeking the Lord and not going on human wisdom or human instincts. Because this is not, this is not, this is not my church, this is not our church, this is God's church.

church. And certainly because it is God's church, we should be guided by God's word. There's a sacred trust.

[46 : 09] And there will be a day of accounting. So I want to ask you as I close this morning to please pray for the elders of this church. Please pray for us. For this year and in the days ahead that we would truly guard our priorities, that we would seek the Lord and that we would be guided by scripture.

Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.