

# Acts 20:17-38

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Uh, maybe you didn't know we were on vacation. We were. Thanks for your prayers while we were away, I guess. But it's good to be back with you all on the Lord's Day.

I heard last Sunday it was hot. Is that right? Well, God answers prayer. It's not hot this Sunday. Thankful for that.

We're looking at Acts chapter 20 this morning, verses 17 through 38. Uh, it's page 929 in the Pew Bible. Let me encourage you to turn there.

We're going to look at a longish section of the Bible this morning. Uh, so it'll be good to have it open in front of you as we go through it. Acts chapter 20, verses 17 through 38, page 929.

Let's pray. God, thank you so much that in Jesus you've given us a cornerstone that cannot be moved, cannot be shaken, and that stands firm in every storm. Lord, our desire this morning as we come, uh, to your word is that we might be more firmly rooted in Jesus, our rock and our redeemer.

[ 1 : 1 2 ] So, Lord, we pray that by your Holy Spirit that would be the case as we look into your word together. We pray this in Jesus' name, Father. Amen. All right. Let me read this passage for us.

Uh, verse 17, chapter 20. Now, from Eiletus, Paul sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them, You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews.

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

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

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

[ 2 : 3 1 ] And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

And from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three heroes I did not cease, night or day, to admonish everyone with tears.

And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.

You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way, we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, it is more blessed to give and to receive.

[ 3 : 4 8 ] And when Paul had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all. They embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again.

And they accompanied him to the ship. Well, friends, think for a moment. What are some of the essential ingredients to your spiritual flourishing?

Quickly, make a list, maybe in your head, of maybe three things or jot it down on the bulletin. What are some things that you would say in order to really thrive spiritually?

Here's what I need. I'm going to give an awkward pause. I'm actually going to expect you to do it. Go ahead.

No, I'm just kidding. What's on your list? What do you need to thrive spiritually? What would be on a list like that? Maybe regular Bible reading and prayer. Maybe Sunday worship attendance.

[ 4 : 52 ] Maybe good spiritual friendship. Peers who can encourage you along the way. And those are all good things. Maybe you even thought of some others that are quite good. But, you know, here's one thing that you might not have added.

In order to thrive spiritually, I need healthy church leaders paying careful attention to my life. I need elders, as Luke calls them here in verse 17.

Recognized church leaders keeping watch over me spiritually. That often doesn't make our list. Now, of course, on one hand, we sort of get it, don't we?

Don't we? That in order for any organization to be healthy, it needs healthy leaders, right? Any company known to man shows that to be true. That the companies that flourish and thrive are the ones that have good, healthy leadership sort of leading the way.

And no doubt that's true of the church as a body, too. Nothing sinks a local church faster than ungodly leadership. Wouldn't you agree? But, while we can all agree that leaders are important for sort of the whole body together, that can still feel a bit abstract, can't it?

[ 6 : 06 ] It doesn't really sort of hit home. We have a hard time sort of personalizing that. But, you know, in verse 28, we see here in this passage that elders are meant to pay careful attention to themselves.

And Paul says, to all the flock. Each member of it. And by implication, that means that it's not just the church as a whole, as a body that needs faithful elders, but you and me individually.

Not just us, but I. If I want to thrive spiritually, I need to have elders, overseers, pastors keeping watch over me.

In other words, fruitful Christians need faithful elders. Beth and I just moved into our new home yesterday.

That's how we spent most of our vacation. Painting and cleaning and fixing. I got a nail gun for Father's Day. That was pretty awesome. Take that bead board in the kitchen.

[ 7 : 12 ] So, thanks to everyone who helped us move yesterday, by the way. This is a good plug to join a small group, because if you ever move, you'll have lots of help getting all the things out of your fifth floor apartment down a rickety old elevator.

Sorry, guys. But anyway, for the last few weeks, we've been sort of getting our house ready to move in. And when we first got the place, one of the things that was in probably a lot of disrepair were the flower beds sort of along the house and the garage.

They were totally overgrown. And someone like me, who knows really next to nothing about gardening, you know, I couldn't tell what was a weed and what was worth keeping. They were all sort of big and bushy and green.

I don't have a green thumb. I sometimes joke that I have a black thumb. I used to have a real tree in my office next door, and then it died. So, I got a fake tree, and now it never dies, which is awesome. But anyway, my father and my mother, my mother and my father-in-law, best parents, are actually really good gardeners.

And they went to town on our flower beds last week. And I can tell you, because I was watching them out the window from the cool of our kitchen, it was a lot of work.

[ 8 : 26 ] It was tough. It was hot. They made big piles of weeds and sticks and branches. And when they were done, it kind of looked like there was nothing left in the garden. But, you know, this week, something really incredible started happening back at the house.

The things that they left started budding and flowering, and our beds started turning into something beautiful. You see, what our neglected gardens needed were faithful, hardworking gardeners.

Someone who could pay careful attention to what was there. And under their care, these once neglected garden beds came to life.

Now, look, would some of those flowers have come out without their work? Probably. I mean, there was sun and rain and soil. That's kind of sort of necessary, right? But, friends, don't you see, God has designed the garden of our souls to come to life, to bloom in all of its glory when we come under the hardworking care of faithful gardeners.

And I think that's one of the reasons why, in all of the book of Acts, the only major speech that Luke records that's specifically addressed to a Christian audience is this one.

[ 9 : 50 ] Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders. Isn't that interesting? You know, we've been sort of working our way sequentially through the book of Acts, if you're just joining us this Sunday.

We've just been sort of plowing straight through, taking it section by section. And as we've been going through, we've been noting that along the way, Luke gives us sort of these characteristic speeches from Paul or from Peter. You know, one of these speeches is sort of the sort of example of what Paul would say to non-believing Jews.

And another is sort of a speech of what Paul would say to non-believing pagans. But here is a speech at last addressed not to people outside the church, but to people inside the church.

Addressed specifically to believers in Jesus. Now, just think of all the speeches to Christians that Luke could have included in this book.

As a co-traveler with Paul, having heard him encourage many, many, many churches. This is the one that Luke decides to include. Paul's speech to the elders, to the leaders of the church.

[ 10 : 54 ] And that ought to be a signal to us of how important this topic is. This text is here not just so that elders in particular can know what they're supposed to do, although that's the main reason.

But it's here so that all of us as Christians can know what we need. And maybe there's even something here for non-Christians too. So that if you're here spiritually seeking, you can see how leadership in the church is meant to be something different than the domineering, oftentimes ego-driven leadership that so often characterizes our lives in the world.

So we can see that the truth about Jesus creates a whole pattern of life that's new. A pattern that's expressed in leaders but is available to all who come to know Jesus.

So let's look then at what we learn about faithful church leadership in our passage this morning.

Here's what we see when we take this passage as a whole. On the one hand, we see Paul sort of reminding the Ephesian elders of his example.

And then we see him sort of exhorting them directly to their task. And lastly, we see Paul kind of commending them or entrusting them to another, to the only one who can really enable them to fulfill their calling.

[ 12 : 18 ] It's kind of the general flow of Paul's speech here. And these three sections in the speech answer three vital questions for us today. And this is what we're going to look at this morning. First, what do elders do?

And second, why must they do it? And third, how in the world can they? Where do they get the strength to do it?

So first, what are elders called to do? And we see this primarily by means of Paul's example at the beginning and the end of the speech in verses 18 through 27 and 33 and 35. He reminds the Ephesian elders here of his past with them in verses 18 and following and 33 and following.

He says, you know how I lived among you. He's sort of looking back to the past, reminding them of his example. And then in 22, he even goes on to tell them what he thinks lies in the future as he heads toward Jerusalem.

And as we sort of sum up Paul's example here, I actually like how John Stott summarized it in his commentary. I think this captures it well. He wrote that Paul's ministry, when we look at it, we see that he taught the whole gospel to the whole city with his whole strength.

[ 13 : 25 ] And likewise, this is what elders are called to do, to teach the whole gospel to the whole church with their whole strength.

Let's unpack that a little from the text. First, the whole gospel. In verse 20, let's look quickly through. In verse 20, Paul says, I didn't shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable. And then in verse 27, I didn't shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

In verse 25, he calls it proclaiming the kingdom. And in verse 24, testifying to the gospel of the grace of God. The role of the elder is to shepherd the people through teaching the gospel.

And not a sort of truncated, human-centered, anthill-sized gospel, but the vast Mount Everest-sized good news.

That is God's eternal counsel, Paul says here. His eternal purpose, his eternal plan to bring his kingdom, his healing and restorative and redemptive reign through an outpouring of his glorious grace supremely at the cross.

[14:46] Friends, this is the whole gospel. You see, biblical elders are those who are captivated by this God-centered good news.

And who communicate it in ways that are helpful, that are profitable to people. That's what Paul's getting at in verse 20. Now, notice that twice Paul says here, I didn't shrink from declaring to you these things.

Isn't that interesting? This means that Paul didn't back away from the hard parts of the gospel itself, or even the implications of the gospel that went against the grain, culturally speaking.

He didn't candy-coated the fact that this glorious good news summons us to, as he says here, repentance towards God and to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, friends, through the gospel, God is calling us to a wholesale change of allegiance and identity. That's what repentance means.

[15:54] That's what faith in Jesus brings. No longer am I going to run my own life according to my own desires and my own best intentions, but I'm going to give the keys to my life completely to God and Christ.

So elders teach the whole gospel. And furthermore, they teach it to the whole church. Paul says how he testified to Jews and to Gentiles in verse 21. Both and.

And Paul, of course, is there specifically talking about his evangelistic ministry, his outreach ministry, but we know that that applies to his ministry inside the church as well. He didn't favor one group over another. He didn't cater his message to one group to the exclusion of others.

In other words, he demonstrated a genuine love for all God's people. You see, elders don't just have a deep grasp of biblical doctrine and the gospel.

They also love all sorts of people. They're concerned as much for the adolescent as for the aging and for everyone in between.

[16:55] They teach the whole gospel to the whole church, and they do it with their whole strength. Notice here how Paul says he taught in public and from house to house.

This sort of both and ministry. In other words, he was in public. He was at the synagogue. He was renting out the hall of Tyrannus. We saw that a few weeks ago. But, you know, he was also at small group sitting on the couch eating the leftover cookies and opening up the Bible with each other.

And he was sitting around the dinner table sharing a meal and asking questions and being personal and intimate and encouraging. He was doing it with his whole strength.

But even more than that, we see Paul's devotion to teaching the church with his whole strength and the fact that he was willing even to face trial and opposition in doing so. It's all over this speech, isn't it? We're going to get to more of that next week.

But look in verse 24. We see that Paul's values had been radically transformed. Don't you see that in that verse? His life found its worth now not in chasing fame or comfort but rather in finishing the course that Jesus had given him to run.

[18:06] Paul wasn't driven by a covetousness for material gain. We see that in 33 through 35. He was willing to work hard to earn what he needed and to even be radically generous to give away what he'd worked for to help others.

Because there was this new center in his life that freed him from these false gods of money and comfort. He could face suffering.

He could face long work hours. All because he knew the grace of Jesus and was now finding his life in him. So this is what elders are called to do.

To teach the gospel thoroughly and to love people deeply and to do it with their whole strength.

Now before we move on, I think there are two more important things to note about elders here that we sort of see obliquely but very importantly.

Notice a couple observations. One, notice that the language here describing these leaders is always plural. It's always elders or overseers.

[19:16] Isn't that interesting? In a New Testament local church, it seems that there's always more than one. There's always a team of men who lead the church together. It's never a one-man band.

Never a single pastor trying to do it all himself. Rather, there's a plurality of elders. And friends, I hope you see that that's really good news. That God was very wise in setting things up that way.

Because you see, if the task of the elders is to teach the whole gospel to the whole church with their whole strength, then certainly you're going to need more than one person to do that well. Right? One individual can't possibly grasp all the ways in which we as a congregation need to understand the riches of the gospel for our time and our place. We need to have shared wisdom, shared experience, and that can only come from a team, from a plurality of leaders.

Second thing. Notice that the titles of elder or overseer or shepherd are used nearly interchangeably here.

[ 20 : 19 ] Now, you might ask, where is their language of shepherding in this passage? I didn't see that. Well, in verse 28, the word that our English standard version translates care for literally means to shepherd.

Other English translations, like if you're reading the NIV or something like that, actually bring that out much more explicitly. So you see, these various titles that we often use today to talk about church leaders, like elder, which Luke mentions in verse 17, or overseer, which is sometimes translated as bishop.

We see that in verse 28. Or even pastor, which is just the Latin word for shepherd. Again, I'm seeing that in verse 28. In the New Testament, all of these titles refer to one and the same office in the church.

An elder was an overseer, and an overseer was a pastor. It was just different ways to talk about the same role. So you see the picture that we find here.

A team of men, all with the same task and function to shepherd the church, to lead it and to feed it. Now, of course, they're going to have different gifts in doing that, right?

[ 21 : 28 ] And they'll use their gifts differently and appropriately in fulfilling that common task and role. But you see, there's no concept here of elders functioning kind of as merely a decision-making committee or a board of advisors, but who don't actually teach and shepherd people.

No, friends, the New Testament vision is that every elder is a shepherd. Whether that elder gives all of his working time to the task and is paid by the church, or whether that elder volunteers his time to the task and earns his living elsewhere.

Think of firefighters, right? You know, whether a firefighter is a volunteer or whether he or she is full-time, they still fight the same fires, right?

It's not as if the volunteers say, whoop, nope, that one's not for me. I'm just going to go roll the hoses. Thanks. No, right? Firefighters all charge into the fire. And it's the same with the office of an elder.

Now, here at Trinity, we happen to sort of use the title pastor to denote the elders who are on staff full-time. It's sort of a just functional way of doing that. And that would be Matt and Greg and myself.

[ 22 : 42 ] We're the pastors. But that just simply means that we're the elders who are on staff full-time. But the other elders, even though they aren't on staff full-time, you see, they have the same primary responsibility and authority that we do.

To shepherd the church. To teach the whole gospel in deep love with their whole strength. So, you know, biblically speaking, you could call them a pastor, sure.

You could call them a bishop, for all I care. Go for it. You know, it's all the same thing, biblically speaking. So, friends, let me just pause here and ask, by way of application.

Do you aspire to the office of an elder? Do you find that desire in your heart? Or do you aspire to be a leader of any kind in the church?

In the various ministries that we have? If so, that's a good thing. Fan that desire into flame. And here's how you can do that.

[ 23 : 45 ] Seek to grow in these three areas. Seek to grow in your doctrine. In your understanding of the whole gospel.

Study it. Learn it. Love it. Apply it to your own heart. And next, seek to grow in your love for the whole church.

Pray for the members. Even the ones that you just know their names and not their faces. Get to know and serve your fellow church members here.

Through a ministry team or through a small group. Get involved in loving people. And finally, maybe perhaps most importantly, seek to grow in your character.

Seek to pursue Christ with more and more of your whole strength. To put him at the center of what you value in your life. And friends, let's pray for one another along these lines.

[ 24 : 50 ] In fact, pray for us elders. That we'll be able to do this more and more. And pray that God will raise up more elders who will exemplify these qualities. And pray and ask God that all of us would be more and more these kinds of Christians.

So then this is what elders are called to do. To shepherd the church by teaching the whole gospel with their whole strength to the whole church.

But now it's good at this point to take a step back and ask why, right? Why is it so critical that this take place? Because no doubt all this is pretty hard work, right?

It's full of sacrifice. Paul says he did all this with tears and with trials. Golly, who wants to sign up for that? Why must elders give themselves to this all-encompassing task?

Well, that brings us to our second point in the second main section of the text. In verse 28 through 31, Paul gives his direct charge to the Ephesian elders. He's done talking about his example and now he's speaking straight to them.

[ 25 : 52 ] And he says, pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock. And then he shows them why this hard work is so critical. Why they must do it.

And what we see first in this paragraph is that on the one hand, there's a danger. Picking up the shepherding metaphor, Paul says, there are going to be wolves who steal into the flock and try to wreak havoc among the sheep.

And some of them, he says, will even arise in your own midst. So you see, friends, elders must do this work because of the danger of false teachers and what Paul calls wolves.

You see, just as elders feed the church by teaching the truth, they're called to protect the church by correcting error. And you know, church history is in one sense like the story of this work in some ways.

One thinks of Athanasius in the fourth century, defending the church against the errors of Arianism. And you know, Arius was actually an elder of a church in Egypt.

[ 27 : 02 ] And he and his followers came to deny that Jesus was fully God. They coined little ditties that would go, there was a time that the sun was not.

And they started singing them. And at times it seemed that the whole church would be swept under and away with this false teaching. But Athanasius and some others, even though at times it seemed like he had to stand alone, alone was a tireless champion of the truth of the gospel.

That in Jesus, God himself came down to us in fullness with no reserve. That Jesus was and is fully God.

And because of that, we can be fully saved. That God took on every part of our humanity to redeem us fully. Isn't that a truth worth fighting for and protecting?

Listen to how Paul describes this sort of work in 2 Timothy. He says, The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

[ 28 : 18 ] God may perhaps grant them repentance, leading to a knowledge of the truth. So it's not a sort of brash, proud, wham you over the head sort of deal. But actually a ministry of patient, persistent, gentle teaching of the truth and correcting of error.

So this is one reason why elders are called to teach the whole gospel with their whole strength to the whole church. Because there are spiritual wolves ready to devour it. But really the main reason is this.

Elders do and are called to this painstaking work because of the infinite value of the sheep. Look again at verse 28.

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

Each and every member of the church. Each and every sheep in Christ's flock, in God's flock, has been obtained with his own blood.

[ 29 : 32 ] This is how much God loves the church. You know, if our love is measured, if our love for something is measured by what we're willing to sacrifice for it, then God must love his church with a love that we will never comprehend.

Because God gave his own son, infinite in glory and beauty, to suffer and die. In order to forgive their sins and grant eternal life.

So friend, if you've turned from sin and if you've placed your trust in Christ, you can know that you are more precious to God than you can possibly conceive.

On your best day of thinking about yourself, you are just a drop in the bucket of the kind of infinite value that God places on you.

Look at a mountain range. In all its grandeur and majesty. Beth and I just moved to Hamden, which I'm told is the land of sleeping, the sleeping giant.

[ 30 : 41 ] Is that right, Hamdenites? Look at a mountain range in all its grandeur and majesty. Look up at the stars on a clear night.

And all of their expanse and their brilliance. But friends, where does God place his most precious and infinite favor, the fullness of it among all of creation?

On the church. You and me. This group of smelly, stubborn sheep.

Who so often get it wrong. And who are so often confused and misguided. Who stumble and bumble and need to be picked up again and again. God has obtained us with his own blood.

Friends, that's the good news. That's why elders are doing what they're doing. That's why God calls them to do what they do. Because they are more precious.

[ 31 : 41 ] You are more precious than anything in all of creation. So friend, don't you see? God loves the church. And I think we should ask, do we?

Do you? Love this thing that God loves? Common sense tells us that a basic sign of spiritual maturity is to love what God loves, right?

Do you love the church? Yes, we're smelly and we're stubborn. But friends, the church is the apple of God's eye nonetheless. And the church will one day be robed in splendor.

Jesus loves the church and so should we all. So this is Paul's charge to the elders.

It's the reason why they must do what they do. What God calls them to do. Because God values the sheep. And because of the danger of the wolves. Because of both of those reasons, elders are called to tirelessly, lovingly teach the whole gospel.

[ 32 : 44 ] But you know, I wonder at this point how the Ephesian elders are feeling. As they're gathered on the shores of Miletus, ready to say goodbye to their beloved teacher and friend, Paul. Which, by the way, as a side note, do you notice how often they're crying in this passage?

We often get this picture in our minds that Paul was sort of this stern, angry guy who like hated everybody and was really mean. And yet everyone in the Bible who actually knew him loved him. And these grown men wept on the shores as they said goodbye.

Isn't that interesting? But you know, think of how these guys are feeling. Paul has just told them that he's never going to see them again. That he's going to Jerusalem, and if he makes it out of there alive, his plan is to head to Rome and then to Spain and probably never come back to the cities in the eastern part of the empire.

And he's just given them this incredible task. He said, okay, here's the people that God loves with an infinite love. There's going to be lots of danger, and you have to keep watch over them and shepherd them. See you later.

Good luck with that. What a task! Who is sufficient for these things, right? How could they possibly fulfill this calling? Where are they going to get the strength and the power to do that task?

[ 33 : 54 ] It's definitely not going to come from themselves, right? Paul just told them that part of the danger is going to come from their own number. Not a good idea to trust in that. That's why, by the way, they need to keep a close watch on themselves.

As much as on the flock. So where does this strength come from? How can they possibly do it?

Well, that brings us to the third and the final part of Paul's speech.

Verse 32, Paul shows them where this power comes from. Let's look at that verse together. He says, And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

What a beautiful verse. You see, friends, at the end of the day, the church doesn't stand or fall ultimately on the basis of the elders themselves. It's not ultimately their wisdom or education or skill that's going to build up the body and preserve it.

No, it's ultimately God and the word of his grace. That's who we look to. That's who we trust. And this word of his grace, did you notice this gospel of Jesus Christ, it's not just what makes us Christians, but it's actually what builds us up and what preserves us and carries us to the end, to the inheritance.

[ 35 : 16 ] That's why if you're visiting Trinity, we just keep talking about the gospel of grace. Jesus Christ, of celebrating it and declaring it and teaching it and delighting in it. The fact that we're helpless sinners, but Jesus is a great Savior.

After all, he's the chief shepherd. The one and only good shepherd. The passage that Jane read for us earlier in the service, did you catch the end of that passage?

God says, I'm coming for you. I'm coming for you like a shepherd, and I'm going to gather you into my arms. And when Jesus Christ came on the earth, he said, I'm the good shepherd, and I'm going to lay down my life for the sheep, and no one's going to take you out of my arms.

And you see, friends, that's ultimately the job of the elders, as under-shepherds to point us to the chief shepherd, Jesus. Paul himself does that very thing in this very speech, doesn't he?

He ends with a saying of Jesus himself. He wants the words of Jesus ringing in our ears as he departs. And this saying, by the way, is not recorded anywhere else in the New Testament, but it's preserved here for us in Acts.

[ 36 : 33 ] It's the saying that Jesus said, it's more blessed to give than to receive. And isn't that exactly the encouragement that elders then and now need to hear? That in the self-giving work of shepherding, there's abundant spiritual blessing.

That as they give, it's actually no loss but a gain. Peter says in his first epistle that there's a crown of glory that awaits those who pour out their lives in this sort of work.

But friend, isn't that the message, and not just elders, but that we all need to hear? That Jesus is the one who didn't just tell us this truth, but embodied it.

That he's the one who supremely gave. That as Paul writes elsewhere, he's the one who didn't consider his equality with God something to be exploited for his own gain, but emptied himself and became a servant and gave his own life on the cross to bring us to glory.

Well, we began by considering that we need faithful shepherds to thrive spiritually. And now we've seen a snapshot of what they do and why they do it and where they get the strength. And friends, I wonder if we can just conclude with some ways that we might respond.

[ 37 : 52 ] Perhaps for you, responding might look like considering church membership.

Membership's a way of saying to a church family and to the elders of that church that I want you to pay careful attention to my life and to point me to Christ so I can grow the way God wants me to grow.

Another way to respond would certainly be to pray for the elders of the church. At our last congregational meeting, we just installed a new elder. Pray for James and the office that God's called him to. Pray for John and for Matt and for Greg and for me.

Pray that we would depend on God's grace and fulfill our role faithfully. Another way to respond would be to open up your life to the elders in the church.

Let us know how we can be praying for you and encouraging you. What are you facing? What are you learning? What are you going through? You know, we're going to do our best to ask and to seek that out, but don't be afraid to let us know.

I mean, we want to be able to love you better and we want to be able to point you to Christ more profitably. And when you share your life with us, it helps us to do that.

[ 39 : 03 ] And finally, you know, another way to respond would be to seek to be this kind of leader. No matter where God has placed you in the church, maybe someday as an elder, but maybe it's as a Sunday school teacher or a small group leader.

Maybe it's just informally among your friends. Friends, prayerfully seek to marshal your whole strength for the whole gospel, no matter where God has placed you.

And remember the words of Jesus. That's more blessed to give than to receive. Give, friends, of your time and your talents and your energies, and you will reap much spiritual blessing.

A fruitfulness that lasts. And by God's grace, we'll see a church, our church, the churches of New Haven, come alive with the glory of Christ.

Isn't that what you long for? Father, we want to pray this morning in line with this passage for those in our own midst whom you've raised up as elders.

[ 40 : 14 ] God, we're so thankful for your faithfulness to your church and to this church that through the many years and through the many seasons you've always given it. Faithful leaders. God, thanks for those who have prayed tirelessly for the leadership of this church.

God, would you help the elders to be faithful to their call, to keep a close watch on themselves and on all the flock. Help us to do that, God. God, we pray that you would raise up more elders in our midst who are godly lovers of you and of your people.

And God, make us a church that's spiritually fruitful. That knows how to love and serve and do much good in our city for the glory of your name. And God, we pray that those who don't know you, those who aren't believers in Jesus would come to see him.

Lord, not as just a good teacher or not as just a distant figure or not as a myth but as a good shepherd. As the one who's come to bring God's kingdom and to lay down his life in the place of sinners.

to bring them to the Father. God, make these things, we pray, true in our midst.

[ 41 : 32 ] For Christ's sake, amen. Well, friends, let's take these things that we've heard in God's word and let's stand and let's encourage one another by singing our last hymn, O Church, Arise.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.