

Leadership: For the Love of Christ and Men

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Just a little bit of background, maybe, to get started as you're finishing up a little bit of breakfast there. When we first planned this, I deliberately, to name the topic in a bland way, I deliberately chose what I thought was an inconvenient time to kind of screen out people so that only the people that were really interested would show up, and I honestly thought that, you know, I honestly thought that there would be 15 men that would show up for this topic at this time in this place, and the fact that, you know, we had well over 50 RSVPs, most of whom came, is really encouraging to me. It's pleasantly surprising to me and it's just a blessing to my heart that you're all here.

I don't know what all this means and to tell you the truth, I've been looking forward to this because I'm interested to see what I have to say also because I have so many things rattling around in my mind and different illustrations and things like that, that I don't know exactly where all of this is going to go. But I'll say this, this is not what might be considered a typical men's meeting. I'm not interested in talking to you today about your marriages or dealing with struggles with purity or anything like that. There's a time and place for that but that's not what this is about. This is not focused on us as individual men. That's not the topic today. The topic today is the church, the church as it belongs to Christ, the church as it is led by spiritual men, and that's the focus for this morning.

I said on Sunday, this has been a little bit of a turning week maybe for me, a turning point in my thinking and in my approach on some things. Sunday's message was not at all what I had intended it to be, this past Sunday when I talked about all the 7th anniversary stuff and all of that. You know, my mind went in a little bit different direction than what my notes had intended. I've been as elders with Dane and Andrew, who's not with us, he's not feeling well, he sends his regrets, we've been talking about leadership in our elder meetings and things like that, and my sense is, you know, these things are entirely subjective but I've been doing this for a while, my sense is that Truth Community Church has turned a little bit of a corner at its 7th year. That's my sense. I could be wrong about this, you know, the Lord may humiliate me for saying the things that I want, some of the things that I'm about to say, but as I said on Sunday, you know, our church, it's been a long runway for us to go down to get off the ground. We started in rented facilities 30 miles away from where we're at. We get 2 ½ years into it, we establish charter membership and then we promptly relocate 30 miles to go to this location and after we did that, we're a construction zone for a while, you know, we go through some growth and development and challenges in leadership, and it seems to me like maybe things have

stabilized a bit now where we're in a position to build on what the first seven years have started, and what today is about is this, what today is about and my son actually gave me the right phrase to describe what's happening here this morning, what's happening here this morning is a grassroots level at starting the development of leadership at Truth Community Church.

We have three elders, two of them are old and then there's me and the ratio of people in our database to elders is about 100:1 or 125:1 or something like that. That's a lot of people and it makes it difficult to tend to all of the needs that you would like to tend to as elders. Elders don't grow on trees, and church leaders don't grow on trees, and people who love Christ enough to love his people is a smaller subset of all the people that come to any given church. As I've said so many times from the pulpit, we are conditioned to approach church with a consumer mindset, "Does this church have what I want out of it? If not, I'll go to the church down the street that has what I do." You know, "Oh, you don't have this or that program? You don't have this or that for young people or women, or whatever?" And they go out, they don't come back, and then they write bad reviews on Google about us. I don't care about that because there's a method to what we're trying to do.

But with that said, we need to come together as men with a common understanding of certain basic priorities about the church and what church leadership is supposed to look like, and what the men who are in church leadership, what their philosophy and what their perspective is supposed to be and that's what I want to talk about here this morning. This is not an exhaustive treatment of the topic at all. If you're newer to our church and you'd like to see some of the more specific biblical teaching that we've done on this, look for my messages on Titus 1 about an introduction to elder leadership, and there are two or three messages there from Titus 1 about the qualifications of an elder and all of that. This today is a little more, even more basic than that. It's even broader than that. So that's where we're starting from, that's the starting point, is that we're looking at things from a long-term perspective here this morning. We're looking for men who identify with, who resonate with, who embrace the kinds of things that we're going to start talking about this morning, and this time this morning is really just a prelude to other discussions. This is just laying a foundation for maybe more meetings like this in the future or private discussions with some of you about what your aspirations are for your involvement in the church.

We have young guys who, you know, are still in high school in this room, we have guys that are old like me. Let me just preface with a little bit of personal information here that is not about me but it's just about conditioning your perspective on any examples that I might use going forward, okay? I've been a Christian now for about 35 years or so, a little over 35 years. During that time, I have been involved in eight different churches. The last 25 years predominantly at Grace Community Church in California and here. My wife and I were in a few different churches after we got married. I've served as an interim pastor, I've served as a pastor of a very large fellowship group at Grace Community Church, I've done pulpit supply. There's a reason why I'm saying these things. Look, I've already got this job, I'm not trying to develop a resume, I'm not talking to you like you're some kind

of search committee and I'm trying to impress you. That's not it. I'm just giving you perspective that helps you understand where I'm coming from in what I say. I've taught at seminary, I helped train men for ministry, I've counseled pastors, I have many many friends who are pastors, and so there's just a lot of breadth of relationships and history that a lot of different streams that all contribute into the river of what I want to say here today. It's predominantly biblical but my perspective is unavoidably shaped by some of the experiences that I've had and some of the emphases that I would make are shaped by things that I've experienced and seen over the course of time. My point in all of that is this, what I'm about to say is the point of why I've mentioned all of that other stuff. You should not assume that if I illustrate something, that I'm referring to something that's happened at Truth Community Church. That's really really important. Anything that I say is not about persons or personalities, it's about principles and the illustrations that I use are for the sake of illustrating what I think are really critical principles for us as a church going forward, not to make statements about any individual men that might come to your mind. You should not assume that you know who I'm talking about because I'm drawing upon hundreds and even thousands of relationships that I've had over the course of 35 years. So if we can clear our minds of that and just talk about things from a perspective of principle, then we'll be off to a good start.

Now with that said, let me just pivot briefly into what I wanted to say from Scripture here this morning. Church leadership, its philosophy and practice. You know, we have to start with the question: what is the church? What is the church and we have to start with definitions in order to get anywhere in a discussion like this. What is the church? The church is that group of people called by God and born of the Holy Spirit who are true believers in Jesus Christ. The church is that group of people called by God and born of the Holy Spirit who are true believers in Jesus Christ. So we're talking about the true church, what some would call the invisible church, those who are genuinely Christians, and are gathered together in a local congregation is our context here this morning, gathered together in a local congregation to honor the God who saved them, to honor Christ. So the church is not the building, of course, it's not the facilities, it's not the program, when we talk about the church, we're talking about people who have had a spiritual conversion, who once were dead but now are born again and are alive in Christ; who once were blind but now they see. Those are the people about whom we are talking about.

The true church, the people in the true church have been on the receiving end of a work of God in their heart initiated by him, planned by him, executed by the Holy Spirit as he applies the redemptive work of Christ to their hearts and draws them into a saving relationship with Christ. People like that are called saints. They're saints not because they have reached a level of holy conduct or spiritual maturity in their lives, they are saints because they are set apart by God, they are set apart by God for his purposes. They are set apart by God to serve him, set apart by God to know him, set apart by God in order to be developed into the image of his Son Jesus Christ. They are set apart for that purpose. Now of those that are set apart, some are maturing, some are growing, some are still immature, some or just barely still kind of thrashing their legs and arms around as infants in Christ. The true church shares in this positional sanctification, having been objectively

set apart by God for his purposes and we belong, therefore, to Christ, and the consequences of that definition define where we go with church leadership and what the purpose of church leadership is and what the qualifications of church leadership are. That very simple definition that I just gave you, has immense ramifications for what we're talking about here today.

I just want to make two points here this morning. First of all, this is fundamental to everything else, brothers, this is fundamental to everything else. The church, this is the first point if you want to take down notes, the church belongs to Christ. The church belongs to Christ. It is his church. It is not ours. Truth Community Church is not my church. It's not your church. It doesn't belong to the elders. The true church belongs to Christ and to him alone and let me establish that point from Scripture and then just kind of tease out a couple of implications of that.

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, "I will build My church." He uses the first person singular possessive pronoun. "My church." It belongs to him and so the church, then, takes its direction from Christ as he has revealed his will in his word, the church takes its direction from Christ, not what the world thinks it should do or what the world thinks that the church should say. It doesn't matter to me if Gallup or Barna take polls and people say, "This is what I want in a church." That's irrelevant. If this were a trial, it would be inadmissible evidence. There would be an objection to relevance and it would be sustained because what matters is, and what our perspective as men in the church must be, is vertical. It's a vertical perspective that says this church, the people of Christ belong to him and he has revealed in Scripture what he wants for the church, therefore, that is where we go, that is our starting point, that's not just our starting point, that is the rule by which we evaluate everything else that happens. It's vertical and, men, with that context, I trust that you'll receive well what I'm about to say. As elders, we care about you men, we care about your families, your wives, your children, all of that. We do, we care about that, but that's secondary and what you think and what you want is secondary to the authority of Scripture and the authority of Christ as he has revealed it because the church doesn't belong to you, the church belongs to Christ and it's his and therefore our responsibility as best we can, study his word, understand his mind and say, "This is what He wants for His church."

Now that philosophy immediately restricts the popularity that a church is going to have out on the street because everybody's a consumer and everybody wants what they want, but for those of us who have truly been born again and belong to Christ, we realize that we've been delivered from the world, we are to have a mindset that's not controlled by the world, and therefore we think differently about it and we say, "What does Christ want for His church?" And that's the first question, that's the defining question and it's what you always come back to in anything that happens operationally in the life of a church.

Now if you have your Bibles here, turn to Ephesians 1 and I just want to give you some quick Scriptures to reinforce this in your mind. Ephesians 1. Paul is praying and he's asking God to enlighten the hearts of his readers so that they could understand the truth about Christ and about his people and he says in verse 20 that God "raised Him from the

dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet," and here it is, "and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." God gave Christ to be the head over the church, to have authority over the church. The church belongs to him and is under the authority of Christ and that is critical for our understanding. As the head of the church, Christ gives direction to his people, he gives life to his people, and we must remember something else about the nature of the church, the nature of these people that gather together in the name of Christ. Christ owns them by right of redemption. In other words, he paid the price to own them when he gave his life as a substitutionary sacrifice on the cross to redeem them from the dominion of sin and Satan. He paid the price for them and when you pay the price for something, you own it. It belongs to you.

Well, the Bible talks about the people of Christ in those terms. In Titus 2, if you want to turn over there, Titus 2:14. Titus 2:14, Paul had just said that we're "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus," then he uses this clause, this adjectival clause to describe Christ and to expand on who he is and what he's done. Christ Jesus who, let me tell you about Christ. Let me tell you about what he did, "who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed," to purchase us from our sinful ways, to grant us forgiveness from our many sins, "and to purify for Himself," here's my point for this morning, "a people for His own possession." He possesses them. He owns them. He has authority over them. They belong to him. There is a sense in which you and I as believers in Christ uniquely belong to him and not to someone else and that informs our perspective on church leadership in ways that we're going to see in a moment.

The church belongs to him. He died in order that he might possess these people; that they might be his, set apart for his purposes; set apart so that he would by the Spirit of God work in their lives, sanctify them in a progressive sense, sanctify them and conform them so that he would use them to accomplish his purposes on earth, so that he would use them to be instruments of the advance of the Gospel and the advance of his kingdom on earth so that they would be set apart so that they would love him preeminently as the first affection of their heart and love him more than they love the world, love him more than they love their family, love him more than they love life themselves. That's why people died for Christ. That's why people give their lives for Christ when they're threatened with martyrdom. "Renounce Christ or die," for them it's an easy choice because they love Christ more than they love life itself because he owns them, he possesses them. That's the righteous, right, proper response for the people of God to have toward him. He owns them. So you and I as Christians are not at liberty to deny Christ. We don't have that prerogative. Even if it brings us suffering, even if it brings us persecution, we're not at liberty to deny the one who owns us. That's just not possible. So these things have implications.

Now, there's one last thing about the church belonging to Christ that I want to point out to you here. It would be easy and, I don't know, maybe over the course of ministry, maybe

I've been guilty of this myself, I don't know. The worst person to evaluate his own pulpit ministry is the guy who has it, you know, you just lose all objectivity. You're biased in your own favor and you're biased against yourself and it's just really hard to view anything objectively. You just do what you do and trust the Lord for what the consequences of that are. But here's my point, why am I saying that now? It would be easy for us to simply talk about those things of possession and Lordship and obedience in a kind of way that seems sterile, that maybe seems a little bit foreboding, that seems a little bit distant when we talk about it that way, but when you look at the fullness of what the Scripture says about Christ's attitude toward the church, you realize that it's not just simply a matter that the church belongs to Christ, there is this aspect at the core, at the heart of it that Christ loves the church. He loves the church.

Look at Ephesians 5:25 where it says, "Husbands, love your wives," that's not our point here for this morning, Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." Christ loves the church. The church is the object of his affection, the object of his saving and sanctifying intention. The church is the object of his intention one day to glorify all those whom he saved by his great redemptive act on the cross. Christ loves the church and not in the way that we've reduced it. What a great week to be talking about this on Valentine's Day and all of this soupy sentimental stuff that's said in the name of love on a week like this. Not in a sentimental way, Christ loved the church and sacrificed his best interest, sacrificed his self-interest on her behalf, sacrificed his self-interest leaving heaven to come to earth, sacrificed his self-interest leading his earthly life knowing that it was going to Jerusalem and to the cross, obeying the Father even to the point of death, even death on a cross, all contrary to his own human self-interest, giving himself, giving up the glories of heaven for a time, giving up his life so that he might do what was good and necessary to save his people. That's the nature of his love. He sacrificed for us. He gave himself for us. In Galatians 2:20, I know I quote this all the time, Paul says, "He loved me and gave Himself up for me."

So we remember as we think about the church, we think about Christ, we think about these issues, we realize that as sinful guilty creatures, we had no claim on him, and we realize that at his initiative, by his own love, by a plan established by God before the beginning of time, that Christ came and gave of himself in a way that secured our well-being, not just temporally but eternally, rescued us from sin, Satan and damnation, delivered us into the family of God where we will enjoy nothing but the benefits of his love and mercy and kindness now and throughout all of eternity. That's what Christ did for his people. He loved them like that and it was a high price that he paid to purchase a people for his own possession, and because he paid that price and he was the only one who could, because it was his plan, his purpose, you know, John 3:16, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever would believe in Him would not perish but have eternal life." We are on the receiving end of an undeserved, God-initiated, gracious act by Christ that has secured our eternal life and our eternal well-being.

Now, when Christ has done that, it's not merely that Scripture says he owns the church, that the church is his possession, it ought to be clear in our minds, it ought to be clear in

our affections that he deserves the possession. This is right. This is the only proper way to think about reality is that Christ deserves the ownership of those people by the price he paid and by the love he showed. The church owes its all to him in a vertical perspective that transcends anything horizontal that might try to intrude. Lin, you're nodding. I'm assuming you agree with me. Alright, you're tracking with me. Good. I'll take you as representative of the other 50 men in the room.

Now, men, here's the thing: that is our starting point for church leadership. Whether there are future elders in this room or not, whether it's deacons, maybe you just say, "Do you know what? I don't want to take on the responsibility but I do love the church and I want to be a part of the life of the church." That's okay too. You know, one of the things about this, I mean, look, as I'll explain later, there's not way that if there's 50 men in the room, there's not 50 future elders here, okay? It just doesn't work that way. It doesn't work that way. Would to God that it did, but you know, that's not the case. You know, some men may be future elders, may be future deacons, may be just some men who are faithful within the body of the local church, all of those things are legitimate, worthy, and there's no distinction in my mind between the two, it's just a matter of office, not worth, okay? But here's what I want you to see right now, is that what's key for us, every one of us has a part in developing, taking the next step if we have turned a corner after seven years of Truth Community Church, here's part of the way that we turn a corner, that every one of you have ownership and participation in, it's to understand and to have that perspective on the church because if we have scores of men that understand and embrace that principle, then all of a sudden we are developing a church-wide culture, for lack of a better word, of perspective about why the church exists and why we're coming together.

I want to put my glasses on now. Normally I'm taking them off and tossing them someplace but I want to make eye contact here. That has really massive consequences for us. If we have a collective as well as an individual perspective on this principle, something really critical takes place. In the collective mind of the church, in discerning others who come in the name of Christ down the road, discerning teachers outside the church and assessing men within the church, something really critical happens here. When you understand that the church belongs to Christ and not to you and that what your desires are are secondary to a greater purpose and a greater person, then something really critical has happened and taken place. What happens is that this principle breaks the principle of self-will in a congregation and conditions them toward humility and deference and love toward one another. I'm not here to assert my will on a congregation, I'm not here to assert, you know, this is true of all of us, not just me, we're not here to assert our will on this because it's not our church. It doesn't belong to us. So there is a built-in principle of deference that starts to permeate and flavor and inform all of our relationships and everything that we do otherwise. This foundational principle goes everywhere. It's the critical starting point about church leadership.

That's the end of my first point. Questions?

Now, you know, honestly, it would be worthwhile to stop there and just let that sink in. I don't want to do that. I've got more to say. But that's the starting point, men, and let me

illustrate now, drawing upon those thousands of relationships that I was alluding to earlier. I'll just give you perspective, give you my perspective on how this applies. Particularly at Grace Community Church, I don't mean this in a derogatory way. You've got a celebrity pastor like John MacArthur that everybody knows, or maybe not everybody but, you know, John's got a profile in the church. That attracts men with agendas. It attracts men who are attracted to the power, it attracts men who want, you know, in on the action and all of that, and you end up with a culture of people who start dropping names. There was a guy in a church, one of those churches that I've mentioned in the past, this kind of informs my perspective, who showed up one time and started dropping names to the pastor, telling the pastor who he knew. "You know, I know such-and-such a pastor and, you know, I'm friends with him." You know, he's brand new to the church and he starts dropping names and trying to impress the pastor with his connections in the Christian world.

Well, now look, for me, you know, when I hear something like that, that's the quickest way to make me question why you're here. If you're here to drop names and you're trying to borrow someone else's credibility because you know Paul Washer and you're brand new, it's evident, it's evident that you're just dropping names trying to bolster your own credibility so that I'll think you're somebody or that the pastor will think you're somebody but you're not. When you're boasting and building yourself up like that, it tells me that you're not here for the sake of the people that are here, you're coming with an agenda, and that's immediately a concern. If that were to happen here, if somebody showed up and did that here, I would be immediately concerned and suspicious of why that person is even here. Why are you dropping names when the whole idea is for us to come together and to serve each other, to love each other, without saying in the 1 Corinthians 1 sort of way, "I'm of Paul. I'm of Apollos. I'm of Christ. You know, look who I'm identified with."

Well, do you know what? This is one of those things I shouldn't say, men. This is one of those unscripted moments that I said, "Don, don't go there. Don't go there." But I'm gonna say it anyway. Just for the sake in the circle of this room and just giving you a little bit of pulling the shades just a little bit back on my inner heart. I mean, you guys know where I came from. There's no point in trying to play that game with me. There's no point in playing that game with me. If we want to play that game, I can talk about my past relationships and my past access with men of prominence, but that's not what we're about. That's not what we're doing. We're not trading stories, competing with prominence based on the people that we know. We are here because the church belongs to Christ and we love him and we want to serve him whether anyone notices us or not. It's just not important to us. We don't have a marketing budget here. We don't have a great big social media presence except to just send out links to our sermons. We're not trying to trick people. We're not trying to impress people. I don't care about that at all. I've been there in the past, I've done that, that's not what we're about here at Truth Community Church.

So for your sake, if someone comes in and you hear someone talking about the people that they know, you can be gracious, you don't have to challenge it or anything like that, but you should just immediately mark it in your mind, "Something's out of sorts there that that would be one of the first things that you would say to me." Now maybe after we get

to know each other, we've established some context in the relationship, say, "Oh, you know, I used to work for So-and-so." Really? Oh, that's cool and did you know him? We could talk about it then. What I'm talking about here this morning is when a guy leads with that and I've seen guys lead with that and there's no future. Look, do you want to know the truth? There is no future for a guy at Truth Community Church that leads like that. You wouldn't even want that, would you, Ethan? You wouldn't want a guy like that having leadership over you, boasting in himself, would you? You wouldn't want that, of course not, and so what I want you to see is that, and I think that part of what's reflected there and what that's symptomatic of is that when a guy is sufficiently impressed by Christ, he's not so inclined to talk about men, no matter who he's known in the past. That's what I think.

Now, second point then. I answered my own question which was fun. Could you tell us what else you think about? Well, sure, I could do that. How much time do you have? All day, yeah, thanks. I appreciate that.

Point 2, actually let me lead into point 2 with a question, really basic: how, then, if the church belongs to Christ, how does he lead the church when he is not physically present? How does Christ lead his church when he is physically absent from earth? Well, that leads us to the second point and it's this, is that the church has spiritual leaders. The church has spiritual leaders and at another time we can talk about elders and deacons and distinguish those offices, for now I just want to talk about it in a general sense of church leadership, men who have authority. Christ has his plan, his purpose, what he has done and determined is that he would mediate his leadership in human terms through the leaders in the church who are under the authority of his word, who are familiar with the word and with its doctrine, and therefore can communicate the truth of Christ to the people of Christ and to hopefully be able to apply it with wisdom in the context of a local body. He has appointed that men of certain qualifications would be his representatives and mediate the derivative authority of Christ amongst his people.

Look at the book of Acts 20:28. Paul tells the elders at Ephesus, Acts 20:28, he says, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." There you have again the authority, the purchase, the ownership of Christ. The church belongs to God, the church belongs to the Christ who bought it with his own blood, and what Paul is saying to those leaders of that church at that time, he says, "You've got to guard the church. You've got to guard the people that are under your authority. You have a unique responsibility as leaders in the church to protect the flock, to guard them from those who would cause them harm." So there is this sense of responsibility for protection that is uniquely placed on the leaders of the church, those who oversee the work of the church that uniquely belongs to them. Christ has appointed that men who are qualified in a Titus 1, 1 Timothy 3 sort of way, would carry the responsibility for looking out for the interests of his people in his absence.

In Ephesians 4, Scripture talks about this role of leadership as a gift that God gives to the church. Ephesians 4:11, "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as

evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ," that body which belongs to him, "until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." So God's plan was to give men to the church, to raise up men in the church who would have a unique particular responsibility to provide for the spiritual care of the flock. That's how Christ does it. It's not in an invisible remote sense but that there are leaders that are designed to mediate his love and care and authority over a congregation.

Now, in the world that would sound kind of scary because we're used to men abusing authority. Scripture provides for that, Scripture pre-screens men for the position with the biblical qualifications found in 1 Timothy and Titus. Let me put it this way, this is gonna sound really odd but a man has to be an elder before he becomes an elder. By character, by manifested faithfulness in service, a man has to demonstrate the characteristics and the character and the conduct of an elder before he ever receives the office so that this is the way that it works, you don't appoint a man as an elder and then hope that he grows into it and then see how it works out. No, you appoint men who have proven that they are predisposed to these characteristics and they manifest them over time before you ever give them the office and thereby share the authority with them.

Look, someone asked me sometime, "Why are there only three elders at Truth Community Church?" Well, there are a lot of reasons for that, I guess, but part of it I just want you to understand is that we understand that one elder can do an awful lot of damage to a congregation. One unfaithful elder who disqualifies himself or does something to harm the flock can hurt a congregation for a long time to come. We are living in the midst even this week of the manifestation of a lot of failure in spiritual leadership. The Houston Chronicle and I believe one other newspaper published a report that many of you may have seen identifying hundreds and hundreds of pastors and other people in spiritual leadership within the Southern Baptist Convention that had been convicted or credibly accused of sexual abuse of people within their congregation. Hundreds of them. Yeah, actually the number I saw was more like 700 throughout the whole Convention. It's hundreds and hundreds of them and people's lives are wrecked by this. On a more individual matter, it's a matter of public record now that the elders at Harvest Bible Chapel in the Chicago area dismissed James McDonald from his pastorate just this week for abuse of his spiritual position and all kinds of other things that had been percolating for a very long time.

These things matter. These things matter and it's our perspective as elders and my perspective as the pastor here, that we don't pass out positions in church leadership like we're passing out candy at a Fourth of July parade. There's too much at stake. There is too much at stake. There is the honor of Christ that is at stake and there are the sheep for whom he died that's at stake. And so, yeah, we're careful about it. Scripture even commends this to us. In 1 Timothy 5 it says, "Don't lay hands on anyone too hastily. Don't share in the sins of other men." So, yeah, we're deliberate, we're taking the long view here, and that's why we're careful about it. It takes time to find out what's really in a man and sometimes the sad truth is, you know, this is a source of ongoing grief to me

over, you know, a couple of decades of ministry, sometimes you find out that a man's not who you thought he was. You know, look, it's hard for me to get over that frankly. One of the men who served on my ordination council disqualified himself morally from ministry and was in the midst of disqualifying himself even when he was serving on my council. This is a man I trusted, you know?

Now I can deal with that personally, you know, that doesn't cause me to stumble that there was, you know, that level of hypocrisy so close to my life but, men, what I want you to see is that for the young tender lambs that come together in a church, it's not so easy for them. They can't just brush that off. They say, "I trusted him and look what he did. He misled me. He left me and I don't know what to do with that." The understandable suspicion that that creates by men and they transfer that suspicion to God and wonder if they can trust him or not. Yeah, yeah, you know what? I'm more concerned to protect people from that kind of harm than I am to stroke a man's ego by elevating him before his time, and if that makes me a bad person and a controlling pastor, you know, I'll accept that charge but there's a reason why it's done that way. And the only way, the only way that you can get to know men is by observing them over time. That's the only way we can know. A guy comes in boasting that he knows Paul Washer, that's no guarantee that he's actually a godly man fit for qualifications in church leadership.

I'm being dangerously candid here and unscripted here. No one who knows my philosophy and actually understands our church, no one would be stupid enough to walk in and announce it and introduce themselves on those terms. It was like that at Grace Church too and it's kind of funny. People, I have a bunch of faces in my mind, all of them make me smile, people would try to leverage elders to do what they wanted to do by talking about how they were friends with John. "You know, I've known John for 20 years and, you know, we're friends, and you know, I washed his car one time," or something like that, you know, something dumb. They were declaring that they didn't understand how anything worked but my point is that they're trying to leverage associations and assert associations in order to accomplish their agenda and that has no place in the church.

So it takes time, men. It takes time and collectively as a church we have to be patient to observe a man over time, to let him be tested by time because as John MacArthur says, you know, I'm friends with John, as my friend John said to me many times, time and truth go hand in hand, and time will manifest the truth of a man's character over time. And sometimes you have the sad reality, as I said earlier, sometimes you have the sad reality that, well, time showed that he wasn't the guy I thought he was and all you can do there is say, "Okay, Lord, thank You for making that plain and not letting it cause more trouble than it did." And you move on.

But here's the thing, and I need to get through the rest of my notes here. Men, this is it. I'd stand up on this table but it's kind of a little flimsy. This is a point worth standing up to make, and plus my legs are getting tired. A man is qualified for church leadership only if – now look, let me preface this because this is a really important point – in what I'm about to say, I'm presupposing the biblical qualifications of Titus and Timothy. I'm

presupposing a measure of doctrinal fidelity and facility that lets a man teach the truth. I'm presupposing all of that stuff, okay? Talking about something else in this context. Biblically speaking and certainly here at Truth Community Church, a man is qualified for church leadership only if he shares Christ's love for Christ's people. I don't want a man who wants to be a leader, per se. Before we get to that question, what a church needs to know is does this man love Christ and does he love the people of Christ? Without that being manifested, a man has no business having his hand anywhere near the levers of church leadership. You need to know in advance what the man is going to do with the authority. If he has manifested self-love and self-advancement, that's what he's going to do with the authority too. Look, we can't gamble with the lives of Christ's people and hope that maybe a guy will turn out right. To the extent that we can know these things in advance, we need to know that it's going to turn out right and that takes time.

Now, because we are acting as stewards for Christ, therefore we must have Christ's attitude toward the stewardship that is his, specifically his people, and you see this repeatedly in Scripture and I'm about to be done here. Look at the Gospel of John 21. I have several messages actually on John 21 that I don't think I've preached at Truth Community Church, maybe I have.

John 21, you remember when Peter was restored after the resurrection. He denied Christ three times, Christ is going to ask him three times does he love him. John 21:15, "when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.'" What's the instruction that follows on the heels of that to this apostle, to this future leader in the church that would be born at the coming of the Holy Spirit? "He said to him, 'Tend My lambs.'" Verse 16, "'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' 'Lord; You know that I love You.' 'Shepherd My sheep.'" Verse 17, "He said to him the third time, 'Simon, do you love Me?' He's grieved that he got asked the third time and he said, "'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend My sheep.'" Here's what I want you to see, men, is that in response to a confession of love for Christ, Peter was given the responsibility then to tend to and to care for the sheep of Christ. "Care for My people, Peter. Care for My church then." Here's what I want you to see, for all of us whether you aspire in leadership or not, for all of us in the true church, for every true Christian there should be a sense, there should be a time that comes when your love for Christ, you understand that your love for Christ starts to transfer or to expand, that vertical love for Christ expands horizontally to others for whom he died like he died for you, and you love Christ and therefore you love the people that Christ loved and loves, and as Christ loved them by a spirit of service and self-sacrifice and humility, then you start to adopt Christ's love toward his people as the attitude that you carry toward his people as well. I don't know, maybe that sounds really basic. "You got me out of bed for that?" But it's not so basic. This is at the core of everything. This is at the core of what motivates us to gather together.

Look at 1 Thessalonians 2. I'm building up to a conclusion here, believe it or not. 1 Thessalonians 2. I can't read the whole passage for the sake of time but in verse 4, the Apostle Paul said, "we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel."

There are a lot of guys that want to teach, there's a smaller subset of those guys that actually want to love the people of Christ. There are a lot of guys that want to teach, it's a smaller subset of men who actually want to love the people of Christ and to use teaching to that end as a part of the means to that end, and we're committed at Truth Community Church to keeping that distinction and that extension clear in our minds. We were entrusted with the Gospel, "so we speak, not as pleasing men," why would we please men, the church doesn't belong to them, "but God who examines our hearts." Verse 5, "For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed-- God is witness--nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority." Here's the point for today, "But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us."

Beloved, that's what I'm talking about when I say that spiritual leadership in the church is marked by men who have a love and affection for the people of Christ. It's not just the guy who is a successful businessman. A successful businessman can love the church. I've been blessed to know a lot of men like that. But business success does not make a man an elder. Nothing about worldly success has anything to do with whether a man is qualified to be an elder or not except to the extent that he would have a good reputation with those who are outside. Rather, you find leadership being marked by those who share Christ's affection for the church.

Now we come to the, this isn't a good way to put it, it's a bad way to put it but I'm gonna put it this way anyway, this is the home run point that I wanted to make today. All of that in the past hour to say this in the next three minutes. Here's the thing, men, men that I speak to you as brothers, as men that I care about, as men that I pray for, as men that I respect. Okay, so you understand my heart in what I'm about to say. We say the church belongs to Christ, Christ loves the church, and spiritual leadership should mirror the love that Christ has toward his people, spiritual leadership, church leadership mirrors that love in its horizontal relationships with the people within the church. Here's the thing: Scripture suggests to us quite strongly that that kind of love is actually a comparatively rare quality. It's not common.

Look at Philippians 2 and there's actually a second place in Philippians that I'm going to go to with this that I just recognized. Philippians 2, Paul says in verse 19, "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition." Why is he sending Timothy? There are a lot of guys he could send, I'd think. He says, "I'm sending Timothy for I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus." That's a great commendation of Timothy and it also gives us a little bit of window of insight into the nature of church leadership, of spiritual leadership. Paul says, "I've got to send you Timothy because there's no one else I can send. I know Timothy, I know Timothy is genuinely concerned for your interests. Timothy will look

out for what's best for you. Everybody else, they're after their own gig. They're after their own things. They're all seeking after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus."

And you see this reflected in a negative way over in chapter 3 when he says in verse 17, he says, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us." He says, "For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ." There are many that started out and so many of them just proved to be enemies of the cross in the end because they were all seeking after their own interests. You could look at 1 Peter 5 later for further support of what I'm saying here. Scripture tells elders not to lord it over.

But beloved, what can we say, what can we wrap up about church leadership here in the final 35 seconds? Not enough, I'm gonna go over. Church leadership, the philosophy of church leadership starts with a recognition that Christ owns the church. Christ mediates his authority through human church leaders subject to Scripture, and they are given that authority in order to be an extension of Christ's love for his people, to protect them, to provide for them, to guard them, to guide them. And so what do you look for in a church leader? You start with the biblical standards, of course, but when you're looking for a church leader, you look first not for a man who is eager to lead. That's not the first thing that you look for, not a man who is eager to lead, but a man who is eager to love, a man who manifests an ability within his family relationships, within his personal relationships in the ways that he manifests faithfulness and involvement within the life of a local church, a man who manifests a desire to love the people of Christ because he's doing it for the Christ who died for them, he's doing it as an act of love vertically toward Christ because do you know what? Do you know what? I'm restraining myself. I'm going to look back on this and say, "Wow, you were pretty restrained there. This didn't get so dangerous after all." The man who loves Christ and loves his people is a man who's going to be faithful. He'll be faithful because that's what love compels him to do. He won't be in and out. The man who loves is a man who is not going to be self-willed about things, the man who loves is going to be a man who stays because he loves the flock, he loves the people that Christ loves. It's an extension of the love that he has for Christ and says, "Oh, Christ loves these people, then how could I serve them, how could I minister to them," is the spirit of it all.

Now, I say this in love but I say it because I think it needs to be said. You know, I told you beforehand, 50 guys here, I love you, I pray for you, I'm glad every one of you is at our church. Every one of you. You are a blessing and a gift from God to Truth Community Church. Period. End of paragraph. Having said that and I leave this by way of challenge and self-examination when it comes to your perspective on the church and church leadership, I'm not so young and foolish as to think that we've got 50 men here in the room right now that understand this, that understand these things, whose interests are truly those of Christ Jesus and not those of seeking after themselves. I'm not making an accusation here against anyone. That's the furthest thing from my mind. Paul said when he wrote to Timothy at the end of his life, he said, "Only Luke is with me." He's by himself at the end of his life. The Apostle Paul, for crying out loud! Those things lead me to understand that this kind of love of which we speak is a comparatively rare quality and

it would be foolish for us collectively and individually to just assume that that's true of every one of us in the room. So rather the starting point here is not to say isn't it great that we're all like this because we all came out on Saturday morning for this. That's not the right response. You know, the right response is a little bit of self-examination that says, "Yeah, Lord, I want to be a man like that. I want to love Your sheep."

The last thing I'm going to say here, nearly forgot it but it's a good statement to say. Why is it so important for us to be like that as men? Why is it so important for us to be mindful of all of these things of which we have spoken? For the sake of Christ, for the sake of his people, sure, we get all of that, but beloved, don't you understand that it's the nature of sheep that they attract wolves? Sheep attract wolves and therefore we have to understand these things, therefore we have to be on guard, and therefore we have to on the one hand we're mindful to have our arms around the true sheep to strengthen and encourage them, and I'm paraphrasing Calvin in what I'm saying here, we have another hand in which we keep the wolves at bay and keeping the wolves at bay is not a pleasant task because you're subject to misunderstanding and criticism and all kinds of accusations and it isn't any fun. But the thing that makes you persevere through that and to pay the price for that is the fact that as a leader, as a spiritual leader, you're willing to pay that price, you're willing to endure that because you love the sheep enough to be spent for them; to take the attack yourself so that the sheep are protected from those who would come and bite them and devour them. So we don't seek church leadership, we don't think about church leadership in the sense that this can make me more prominent, it's more along the lines of saying, "What can I do to be a servant to the sheep of Christ?"

Here in where we're at in this moment in the life of our church, for most of us it just starts with continuing and manifesting and developing faithfulness in whatever's before you and seeing what comes after that. I'm not going to approach any one of you after this and say, "Hey, you know, what would you think about being an elder?" That's just not where this is going. We've got to start further back with an understanding in private conversations amongst yourself, private conversations with me or Dane or with Andrew after some self-reflection and some self-awareness that says, "Do you know what? I do have that desire to serve like that. I do want to be a servant to the sheep. It's not about me." And then we see where it goes from there.

Questions? I'm done.

We start here. In a sense, we start today. Now it's all out on the table. Now we know what church leadership is like and what it is that marks church leadership at Truth Community Church and now even if you're not inclined or you're too young for church leadership right now, you can become part of the process as you start to say, "Do you know what? I do see that man manifesting those kinds of characteristics." And your response and your perspective informs us in the future because we know you understand it even if it's not what you want for yourself. "I see that in that guy. What do you think? Well, let's watch him." If you're like Norman D. just before the state championship game in the movie "Hoosiers," putting the hands in together, "I love you guys. Team."

Alright, well, it's a lot to think about, a lot to pray about. I'm grateful for each one of you and grateful to be here to be a part of this. This is a blessing so why don't I pray for us and I know some of you need to leave right away. I have some things too.

Father, we just commit all of this to You. I pray for each man in front of us young and old, Father, for the application of these things by the Holy Spirit to their hearts. Lord, You know that to the best of my ability I've spoken in love, spoken to be edifying, spoken to encourage and strengthen men, and yet Your word cautions us, counsels us to be careful, not to be too quick to make decisions that time and truth do go hand in hand and therefore we don't need to be hasty in these things. Lord, if there are future elders in this room, praise God for that. Raise them up, strengthen them and make them known. But Father, in the meantime, help us to honor the principles by which that is determined and help us to be faithful in the things that were given to us. Father, may this be a great starting point of the development of leadership from the grassroots level at Truth Community Church and may we be men who increasingly live our lives in a manner that is worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.

Thank you for coming. You're dismissed.

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