

Our church values - servantly led

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- [0 : 0 0] Okay, let's pray, let's ask for the Lord's help as we come to think about this together. Let's pray. Loving Father, we want to pray now and ask for your help.
- We know, we were thinking about it together this morning, how you love to reveal yourself to us. You love to speak to us. It is mostly our reluctance to listen, which is the problem.
- And so we pray that you would give us eager ears to listen to what you say. Tender hearts to obey and put it into practice. And Lord, we pray that you might help us to think clearly and carefully and help one another as we think together about the values of our church.
- In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. So we've been thinking over these last weeks about the six values of our church. And you have a little space there to write down as many of the six as you know.
- And then I will get you back to call them out. So as many of the six as you can get, you can work with the person next to you if you like. You have a minute.
- [1 : 0 6] You'll get one of them because it's at the top of this sheet. Who would like to start us off the six values of our church? Lovingly diverse.
- Yes. Prayerfully dependent. Gospely centered. Yes. Sorry, Hilda. Locally rooted.
- Yeah. Servantly led. Kingdomly minded. And so we've done them all then.
- Yeah, right. Have we done gospely centered? Did we do that? Yeah, yeah, yeah. We're upset. So there's stuff about fellowship. Yeah. That's not in there specifically, is it?
- It's, I guess it's implied in the ones that we're looking at this evening. But yes. And in our diversity. So yeah. So yes.
- [2 : 0 2] Lovingly diverse. We love one another. Okay. So we're thinking tonight about being servantly led. I was walking back from this morning's meeting with Luis. We were walking over the railway bridge.
- And I said to Luis, I said, you know, you can tell the difference between an experienced teacher and an inexperienced teacher. Because an inexperienced teacher tries to teach way too much. And an experienced teacher realizes that you have to cut down what you think you can communicate in a sermon.
- And then I was thinking, oh my goodness, Steve. Your evening sermon is utterly ridiculous. And the amount that you think you're going to be able to communicate. So I am displaying my inexperience to you all this evening.
- So let's turn to Mark chapter 10, verse 35 to 45, to see where this idea of servantly led comes from. I've put on your handouts most of the cross-references that I'm going to use, which will hopefully mean that you spare a bit of time of you firing around the Bible.
- But they're not all on there. So you will need your Bible at various points. So here we pick it up in verse 35 of Mark chapter 10. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus, to him.
- [3 : 0 9] Teacher, they said, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. Which is a bold thing to say to the king of kings. What do you want me to do for you?

He asked. They replied, let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in glory. You do not know what you are asking, Jesus said.

Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? In other words, guys, you have no idea. You have no idea what is about to happen and what is coming your way.

We can, they answered. Jesus said to them, you will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with. But to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant.

These places belong to those for whom they are prepared or for whom they have been prepared. In other words, listen, we're not doling out high seats in glory right now.

[4 : 09] You will suffer for the kingdom in the way that I will suffer for the kingdom. You will drink down the cup and be baptized in the way that I am doing those things too. But I am not going to give you the place in glory that you request.

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. You can imagine, can't you? What? What were you asking? Were you trying to push us out of the way while you had Jesus' ear?

So Jesus called them together, verse 42, and said, You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. And their high officials exercise authority over them.

Same idea, same words. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. And whoever wants to be the first must be slave of all.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. Greatness in the kingdom, says Jesus.

[5 : 13] Leadership and authority in the kingdom are about service, not about glory or self-exaltation. The contrast is there, isn't it, between the world, which is the word there is lording over, literally gaining mastery over.

This is the sort of authorities that says, I say so, you do. That's the way of the world. Kind of fragile displays of power designed to put people in their place. But by contrast, Jesus, who is the first of all, because he is the slave of all.

Jesus is the one who has served everybody in the kingdom. Because he has given his life as a ransom for many. Nobody is in the kingdom without Jesus being their servant, dying on the cross in their place for their sin, giving himself for us.

And so leadership in the kingdom is not claiming a status, but by becoming Christ-like. So essentially, instead of claiming your status to lead in the kingdom, you surrender your status.

Leadership is Christ-like. It's sacrificial. It's giving oneself up for the benefit of others. It is leadership which is focused on the glory of God and not its own glory. And that, says Jesus, to be the model of leadership and authority in the kingdom.

[6 : 36] Now, you don't need me to tell you that is not always how churches are led, is it? It's not always how churches are led, is it?

And so the world's leadership model is not to infiltrate the church like that. Christ is our leadership model, not the world. And so we need to spend some time thinking together, what does it actually mean for a church to be led by servant leadership?

Servant leadership. And I've got four points, which are sort of dotting around the New Testament, thinking about what leadership and servant leadership looks like in the New Testament. And there's chance for discussion and questions after each one.

So we'll work on that together. So the first one is this. Servant leadership is active, not passive. Now, I start here because I think this is an easy mistake to make.

It is easy to think that servant leadership means no effective leadership, that servant leadership means that effectively you do what everybody else wants and you don't actually really think clearly about the direction in which you're going.

[8 : 03] I was reading a book a couple of weeks ago by an academic called Joe Rigney, who's done lots of research on leadership in church and teaches a seminary in the US. And he made the point that there are many more churches that are ruined by passive leadership than there are by those that are ruined by authoritarian leadership.

Both are a problem in the life of the church. But there are many more churches that are ruined by passive leadership, he says. I don't know whether he's right, but it seems to ring true, doesn't it?

The absence of any effective leadership leads to church decline. And so while it's common, I think, to say, isn't it, that elders are qualified by character, which is true, actually, when you look at the qualifications in 1 Timothy, for example, you see that leadership is one of the qualifications of an elder.

So if you have a look at 1 Timothy chapter 3, 1 Timothy chapter 3, and I think I might put that on your handout, but it might also be worth going there because we are going to look at a couple of verses in 1 Timothy.

So 1 Timothy is on page 1192. In 1 Timothy chapter 3, verse 1, you have the outlining of the qualifications for eldership.

[9 : 20] Let me pick it up in verse 1. Here is a trustworthy saying, whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now, the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. But anyone who does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?

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

Now, it is common for that list of qualifications to be read and say that the only non-character qualification in that list is the ability to teach.

I think apt to teach, as it was originally translated, apt to teach is picking up teaching from the previous chapter in 1 Timothy. But there is another non-character qualification in there, which is this expectation that they manage their own household well.

[10 : 46] Literally, they rule or have authority. And so they are to do that in the home in a way that then qualifies them to do it in the church. So the sign that someone is going to be a suitable elder, that you can recognize them as a suitable elder in the church, is how they lead at home.

So is his home managed well? It's not that he must be married, but rather it seems to be that if he is married, this is where you will see these gifts at work.

Interesting, isn't it, that you will see this qualification of leadership in an elder, not by how they manage at work, but how they manage at home.

Home is where a husband should have a godly influence and taking the family in a good and godly direction. And so the logic is obvious, isn't it? If a potential elder's home is chaotic, if the children have no sense of what is valued or the direction of travel or the expectations of family life, then you can't expect that person to be better leader in the church than they are at home.

And so you need to look out for that. And so we find that servant leadership is active leadership, it's not passive leadership.

[12 : 07] So I want you just to think about that with the person next to you. Think about this. Does managing well in 1 Timothy 3 mean that all leaders in the church should be of the same personality type?

So does that mean that everyone should be, I don't know whether you don't use these types anymore, do you, but a type A kind of person, you know, a person who's always really determined, very clear in their own mind about what they're doing.

Does it mean that we should all be of the same personality type? Why or why not? Have a think about that with the person next to you and then we'll discuss it together. Anyone?

Anyone talking about the question? Clifford? Different personalities, same character traits. Yes, so different personalities, same character traits.

Yeah, Lucy? So they should be humble and able to work as a team. Yeah. Why do we think they shouldn't all be the same personality type?

[13 : 06] Why is being able to manage not a personality type? What is it? If it's not a personality, what is it? Come on, Jen, you're shaking your head at me.

Come on. Okay, you don't know what I'm saying. So what does it mean to be somebody who manages well if it's not this kind of leadership that the world loves so much?

Am I saying it's a skill? I'm asking the questions, Nick. Yeah. Is it a skill to be learned? So I think it is definitely something that you can learn and get better at.

Yeah? Yeah. And so at one sense it is a skill. Yeah. Go on. Sorry, I'm not going to answer it quick.

Come on. Someone else. Managing well would be to lean into different personality attributes that you might have.

[14 : 14] Yeah. Such that it produces something worthwhile. Yeah. Yeah. So it might look different. Yes. So exactly how you do it will look different from person to person.

But I think essentially it's a willingness to own responsibility, isn't it? What is going on in this home is my responsibility. What is going on in this church is the responsibility of the leaders.

And so it is on us as husbands and fathers in order to shape what's going on in our families, to make sure that it is shaped around God's word and God's priorities.

And if we are unwilling to do that in the home and take responsibility for that in the home, then we will not be prepared to take responsibility for that in the church either. And so it's not a personality type.

What I mean is it doesn't mean that this person is a really driven person. It doesn't mean that they're an extrovert. It doesn't mean that they love being on their feet in front of a group of people. We will find that there are all sorts of different ways that eldership works out like that.

[15 : 12] And we'll find that in a moment. It means more that within the personality that the Lord has given me, whether I be an introvert or an extrovert, whether I find certain things easy or difficult, I am willing to own the responsibility that the Lord has given me.

This was Adam's failure in the garden, wasn't it? That he was unwilling to take responsibility and lead his wife away from temptation rather than allowing her to wander into it and him to follow her into it.

So a willingness to take responsibility. And that's the opposite of passivity, isn't it? Passive leadership in the church just says, well, hey, church is declining and really struggling, but I don't know what to do.

And so it just doesn't do anything about it. Okay. Yes.

So that's a good question, Mike. Thank you. I'm sure that my question here is not super well written.

[16 : 21] But it is what is the danger of us making this mistake, of us basically appointing leaders in the church who are all of the same kind of personality?

Because that happens, doesn't it? You see churches doing that. But basically, the elders in the church are all just exactly the same as one another. What's the problem then? Yeah.

I think it's probably a bit stupid, just like friendships form with similar interests of people, but that may well be a natural tendency to try and find people like us.

We have to actively be embraced. Go on, Jeff. Yes, yes.

If you're all of the same personality, it breaks apart. Yeah. Right.

[17 : 45] Yes. Yeah, thank you, Mike. You see, if you all just sort of coalesce around a personality type and you're all just very similar to one another, then you end up rejecting ideas and insights and perspectives that would be helpful to you because they don't come from the same point of view.

Lucy? It's complacency. Complacency. Of complacency, yeah.

You all have the same blind spots, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Elders love to appoint people who are just exactly the same as them because it means they don't have to think too hard. Yeah. Go on. Yeah.

just depending upon what we used to. Yeah. Yes. Yeah. Yes.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It can become very quickly self-dependent. Yeah. And one of the things I think we need to pray for in church life is that the Lord will raise up leaders in the church of a wide variety of different personalities and backgrounds so that they can be a team of leaders who work well together in order to manage the breadth of the church.

[19 : 22] I think there are many things in church life here that we get wrong, I'm sure. But one of the things that you can be really thankful for is that we have a really diverse leadership team. And that is, praise God for that.

Continue to pray that we would be united and work well together. Okay. Secondly, servant leadership is made up of elders and deacons. Now, I just want to talk about the two specific roles that are identified in the church.

The first is the role of elder, which is variously called pastor or overseer, as we've noticed here in 1 Timothy chapter 3. It's pastor teacher in Ephesians 4.

It's shepherd in 1 Peter. But it's all the same role in view. Now, it might be that the church chooses to set apart an elder or some elders and pay them to free them from regular work so that they can spend more time in preaching and teaching.

And it's worth noticing that that's how the New Testament talks about paying elders. It is not so much that you're giving them a salary. You are freeing them from the burden of work so they can give their time to preaching and teaching.

[20 : 36] And Paul talks about that in 1 Timothy chapter 5, verse 17. If you glance over, if you're still in 1 Timothy, the elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

It's interesting in the New Testament church, it seems that once the church has elders, then the church itself is largely left to get on with things on its own.

So there's this kind of grand mission of church planting through the book of Acts and then the appointment of elders in each different place. And once elders have been appointed, then they're left to get on with it. It seems as though a church without elders is considered to be out of order.

Titus chapter 1, verse 5, Paul writes to Titus and tells him in Crete to put into order what remains out of order, which is that they need elders appointing in every town.

Interestingly, that elders are always plural. So there's no instance in the New Testament where we are to expect a one man band or a one person leadership.

[21 : 42] It is always elders, not elder. It also seems that elders in the church are a sort of reestablishment of the family and the Garden of Eden.

So the church is variously called the household of God or the family of faith, the family of believers. And so the elders are there to be essentially sort of like the husbands of this new family. And so the elders are always to be men.

It's expressly mentioned in 1 Timothy chapter 2 and Titus 1 and in 1 Corinthians 14 that elders are to be men. And it's at very least implied in 1 Peter as well.

Nowhere in the New Testament do you have reference to female elders. And that's not because the New Testament is a kind of misogynistic stereotype of its time. Actually, what's surprising in the New Testament when you read it is the high status given to women throughout the New Testament, including their involvement in responsibility for theological teaching, for contributing to the life and ministry of the church, for having churches in their homes, for taking letters from various different places, to being the witnesses to the resurrection. It's not that we are supposed to presume that men have nothing to learn from women.

I know that churches have been terrible at interpreting it like that, but it seems to be rather that the household of God, where each plays its part, is where elders are like husbands who love and serve well, that all in the church might flourish, men and women. And you can talk about that more and ask me questions in a moment if you like. The second office in the church is deacon, literally servant. Often it seems like that's linked with a particular practical responsibility in the church. And deacons in the New Testament are men or women. Female deacons are mentioned specifically in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and in Romans 16. Their role, it seems shaped, at least in part, by the appointment of the seven in Acts 6, who are not deacons, they're not called deacons, but it does seem as that is a kind of prototype of what happens in the life of the church. You are servants in the church, ensuring that gospel ministry is not skipped over, but the ministry of the word of God and prayer is not neglected by those who are given responsibility for it, by making sure that the practical aspects of church life are run well. That's not to mean it's not an important role.

[24 : 10] Rather, it seems that the deacons have a crucial role in the life of the church. In Romans 16, Phoebe is to be welcomed warmly by the Roman church because she is the financial underpinning of many people, including the apostle Paul himself. It seems in 1 Timothy 3 that the esteem given to deacons in the church is a blessing to them and to their walk with the Lord. Now, the New Testament seems to give us these two offices then elders and deacons in the life of the church. Servant leadership involves appointing elders and recognising deacons as well in the life of the church. Now, we're going to talk about membership in a moment, but before we do that, have a think about this. If there are two offices in the church, the office of elder and the office of deacon, then where do two other things fit that we have in our church, which are staff and trustees. So have a think about how do all those groups relate to one another, do you think? How does the office of elder, deacon, staff and trustee? So staff and trustee are obviously not essential because they are not given to us in the New Testament, but we have them here.

Why do we have them? Do we need them? I mean, if you decide you don't need any staff, Louise, Jen and I will go straight home. But have a think about that and how they relate to one another and then we'll go back together. Go for it.

Okay, do you want to share your answers? Would you like to share your answers?

Sarah has asked a question on Zoom, I think. Sarah, I'll answer your question because people are still discussing my question here. The question is, why don't we have any women deacons here at church yet?

At the moment, we have this sort of interim joint leadership team. I hope that we will have women deacons. And so, yes, I think that's just where we are at the moment. I don't think that's a commitment to where we want to be. Our church handbook certainly says that we could and should have women deacons.

[26 : 41] Yeah. Anybody want to help unpick this? Staff and trustees. Thanks. Right. Anybody?

We were saying that regarding trustees, that's like, as Paul was saying, you kind of have to respect authority. Yeah. Follow the laws for that.

Yeah. So, trustees is part of that government that's required. Yes. Yeah. Yes. Yeah. So, having trustees is part of the way that we submit to the government of our time, which says that for churches to be constituted as charities, they need to have trustees who are recognizable in their movements. Yes.

Yes. I think, just for the sake of moving us on more quickly, I think you want to distinguish between what is essential in church life and what is permitted. Okay. It seems as if in the New Testament, it is essential that our church has elders.

Deacons are also recommended in the life of the church, but it seems particularly that elders are essential in the life of the church. If you, you know, a church without elders is like a car without wheels. Right.

[28 : 01] So, I mean, it's technically still a car, but it's kind of a little bit less than what you really need it to be in order for it to function properly. Okay. So, elders are essential. But then I think there is freedom in the life of a local church for you to be permitted to do things that you need to do in order to let the church's mission go forwards.

And I think particularly in our environment, appointing staff and trustees is part of that. Staff especially, because I think in our time, we find that there are many roles in the life of the church that it's difficult for volunteers to do.

I think that's increasingly the environment which we're operating in. And so there's a time in which to appoint people to take on those responsibilities. And actually, there's probably quite a big crossover between staff and deacons, I think, at times, so that certain staff roles will be deacon roles and that kind of thing.

And likewise with trustees. So we need to distinguish between what's essential and what's permitted, I think. And if you say that you should only do what's essential and never what's permitted, your church would never be a charity, for example.

You'd never register with the government in that way and you wouldn't appoint any staff. And I think you probably would limit what the church is able to do. Okay. Thirdly, servant leadership empowers all member ministry.

[29 : 19] Really, this is the point that we're trying to get to. This is what we're trying to say in this value. Our concern is that we want to lead the church in such a way that everyone is engaged in the ministry of the church.

So we're concerned to say in servantly led that the ministry of the church is not done by the elders, by the staff or by the deacons, but the ministry of the church is done by all of us.

This seems to be the model in Ephesians 4, where the work of the pastor, teacher and the evangelist in the church are, verse 12, to equip his people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we reach the unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God to become mature, attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

It is the equipping of the people in the church for the works of service. So really, you can tell whether the pastor is doing a good job, the elders are doing a good job in the life of the church by how engaged others are in the ministry of the church.

It seems to be a genuine danger in the life of a church that the elders effectively fire the congregation, not like shoot them, but fire them from their job, by effectively just assuming that the congregation come to watch the elders do the ministry and then just go away.

[30 : 43] To use this sort of example, it's not like the elders and the staff and the deacons are like the orchestra, and you come and sit in the audience and you watch this great performance.

It's actually that the church itself is the orchestra, and the elders and the deacons and the staff are those who are conducting and ensuring that everyone is playing their part and coming in at the right time and that kind of thing.

So think about some of the ways the New Testament describes the responsibility of church members. This, I think, is surprising. So members in the New Testament are given an extremely high responsibility in the life of the church.

So in Matthew chapter 18, and I'd like you to turn to Matthew chapter 18, if you will, Matthew chapter 18, this is striking as the Lord Jesus talks about the church in Matthew 18.

Matthew 18 verse 15 is talking about sin and dealing with sin in the church, as the heading in the NIV says. It says, verse 15, No, it doesn't say that, does it?

[32 : 11] It says, tell it to the church. And if they refuse to listen, even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. It seems in Matthew 18 that the responsibility for church discipline, for recognizing who is genuinely a Christian by the response to their call to repentance, that responsibility is given to the church as a whole, not the leaders as individuals.

So the highest court, if you like to use that word, in the life of the church is the church itself, not the leaders. In Acts chapter 6 verse 5, the appointment of the leaders is what seems good to the whole church.

It seems that everybody is involved in the appointment of leaders. In 1 Timothy 5 verse 17, the paying of elders seems to be a responsibility given to the church.

So the church are there to recognize the leaders. It's not that leaders inflict themselves on the life of the church, but the church recognize the leaders. Now that comes out again, I think, in the letters to the church in Revelation.

So turn to Revelation chapter 2, to the last book in the Bible, Revelation chapter 2. Revelation chapter 2 verse 14.

[33 : 30] Here's just an example in the letter to the church at Pergamum. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you, says Jesus, to the church.

He says, there are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin, so that they ate food, sacrificed to idols, and committed sexual immorality.

It seems, doesn't it, that the church are responsible for the doctrine of the teaching that they're listening to. That's striking, isn't it? So yes, elders are to be those who can refute error.

We've seen that in 1 Timothy chapter 3. That's the same in Titus chapter 1. But it seems as though the whole church here are held accountable for the ministry that they're receiving. So the church must have some ability to exercise authority over the person who is teaching them.

It's really important in the life of the church that you as members are able to remove the leaders if they're teaching false doctrine and error.

[34 : 37] We're not going to turn to it, but in 2 Corinthians chapter 8, it's interesting that the church itself is given responsibility for the financial integrity of the church as well. There's a transparency that is to be involved in the financial accounting of the church, which is to be done in front of the church itself.

Now, if you put all that together, you can see that like an effective husband or father who helps his wife and children to flourish and to grow in the gifts that they have, so effective leaders in the church enable members to do that, as the members sort of stand over the leaders and hold them to account, but also as they choose to submit to the leaders and to follow them in the service of the Lord Jesus.

It also means, doesn't it, if that's right, what's one of the key tasks of church leaders in the life of the church? What's one of the key tasks of leaders in the life of the church if this is what membership involves?

Let me tell you, because I'm going to ask you another question in a minute. Discipleship. Leaders lead the church by discipling the believers. As church members, we all have a hand on the steering wheel of the church, so it's important that we're all pulling in the same direction, and so discipleship becomes one of the key responsibilities of leaders in the church.

Okay, I want you to do the think about this section. What tools might a church use to allow members to exercise their responsibilities in church life? What are the challenges to doing this well?

[36 : 06] Okay, have a think about that for a moment. What tools might a church use to allow members to exercise their responsibilities? So we talked about responsibilities for discipline, for the appointment of leaders, for doctrine, for financial integrity.

Go for it. Okay, I'm sorry, I've not given you very long on that. Anyone want to shout out their thoughts? How might leaders...

Sorry, Mike, come on. Yes, go on. One of them is teaching citizens. Yes. And the other thing is... Can I just repeat that for...

So the first one was that teaching facilitates members. Yeah. The other thing is... ...but it's like passing in our talents now, so they could be encouraging people to build in this church.

They could be trying to be talents. It's just a dead scene on their own bits. Yeah, great. Talent scouts. It sounds quite wrong, just about it. I know... Yeah, so they're sort of identifying and recognising gifts and putting people in places where they can flourish in those things.

[37 : 11] Yeah. Yeah. And then they could be a trust. Yes. Yes. Yes. That's one of the reasons why I think even, like, smaller meetings in the life of the church are really helpful and they have opportunities for people to try preaching and leading and doing different things.

Yeah, I think that's really helpful. Maybe we could... Discernment is perhaps one of the words that you might put to that. Yeah. That's really helpful. Anything else? Okay.

Anybody else? Anthony. Shh. Shh. What about church members' meetings?

Yeah? That is the function of a church members' meeting. Voting in a church members' meeting is an opportunity to do that. Involving members in the interviews of new members. Inviting members to come to leaders' meetings to discuss things.

Having a kind of open-door policy for discussing things and encouraging that kind of engagement from the life of the church. I think a sort of openness and transparency about what's going on.

[38 : 28] If you want to know what leaders are discussing, you should be able to come and ask. If you want leaders to discuss something, you should be able to encourage them and ask them to do that. And, you know, because we're serving you.

The final point, and we'll just do this really briefly. I just didn't want to miss this out. Because I think one of the other things that is really striking in the New Testament about leadership in the local church is that it's really honest about its weakness.

I think one of the surprises in the New Testament is that other than the person of the Lord Jesus, the portrayal of leaders in the church is of men of weakness and not strength.

Peter denies Christ, withdrew fellowship from Gentile believers and had to be rebuked. Paul persecuted the church. He fled in a basket from Damascus. He went on about a thorn in the flesh and the weakness of his preaching.

Timothy was told that he shouldn't be so timid to not let people look down on him, to take a bit of wine for his stomach's sake. I guess the key text in all that, I think I've put that on your handout, is 2 Corinthians 12.

[39 : 30] Paul writes, Striking, isn't it?

You would not read that in any leadership manual. David Jackman has written a new book on preaching and he says this about pastors. And I read this this week. This is striking. Listen to what he says.

It has been my observation throughout my years of Christian service that no minister or preacher can be truly useful to God's purposes until he has been significantly and deeply humbled.

It is my observation throughout my years of Christian service that no minister or preacher can be truly useful to God's purposes until he has been significantly and deeply humbled. That seems to me to be absolutely true from the New Testament.

And I know that personally is my experience. The longer I go on in ministry, the more conscious I am of my own weakness, that any success in ministry is down to the gracious hand of the Lord.

[40 : 57] The failures and the mistakes are mine and the successes are the Lord's. I know what it is to try and do ministry in my own strength. I know what it's like to be in my own head about how good or otherwise a sermon was.

I know what it is to battle with an unwillingness or a coldness in service. But that, it seems to be, is the pattern of New Testament ministry and that you recognize that.

If you're in a church where the leaders do not recognize their weakness, run a mile. Run a mile. Because it is not a New Testament style of leadership.

It's amazing, isn't it? If you try to manage a Premier League football team like this, you'd lose your job on day one, wouldn't you? But the church is not like that. It's important that leaders are conscious of and honest about their weakness.

Let me explain why I think that's the case and then we'll sing together. I think that leaders need to be honest about their weakness and their sin because the main tool that the leaders are given for ministry is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is for weak sinners like us, isn't it?

[42 : 05] So if I'm pretending that my usefulness and effectiveness in the church is about my strength, then all of a sudden I'm not pointing you to a gospel of grace, but a gospel of works, aren't I?

And so me owning my sin and my weakness before you is a way of me pointing you to a saviour who loves to be gracious and kind to people who don't deserve it. Paul called himself the chief of sinners, didn't he?

Because he was an example to the church of what Christ could do. Let me pray and then we'll sing as we close. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we want our church to be distinctive from the world in the way that it's led.

We don't want it to be led by people who lord it over, who rule and demand obedience. We want to be led by servant leaders who are honest about their weakness and point us to a gospel of grace, who empower all of us to be involved in the ministry of the church, recognising our gifts and our opportunities to serve.

We want to pray that you might raise up men and women who would serve as deacons in the life of our church and serve well for the sake of your glory. We pray that you might raise up elders who would teach and train and disciple well.

[43 : 25] And we want to pray, Heavenly Father, that you would help the leaders of the church here to be servants who are not passive but active and who own the responsibility for the life of the church and move church on and forwards under your gracious hand.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.