

Aaron Kuehmicel - Shepherding in Practice

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So according to the New Testament, there are two perpetual offices within the church, the elder or overseer, and the deacon. In Philippians 1:1, Paul writes to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and deacons, thus indicating a distinction exists between overseers and deacons on the one hand, and the rest of the saints of the congregation the other. Whereas elders and deacons are required to meet a high standard of Christian character and maturity, saints or believers are not required to do so in Scripture. The only qualification that the Bible gives for Christians in general is that they make profession of their faith in Christ Jesus, and all are encouraged to grow in grace, faith and knowledge in Christ. So elders and deacons are the two scriptural roles in the church.

Today we want to consider our individual responsibilities as a member of our local ekklesia, our local church. Now, the roles, the responsibilities, and the mindsets of the biblically sanctioned leaders of the church also define the practices and mindsets of our Lord Jesus. This means then, that all the qualifications, all the mindsets, all the responsibilities of our leaders as followers of the Lord Jesus apply to you and me individually and the church body collectively. Whether or not we have an elected role in the church. All the things our elders and deacons are doing to shepherd and serve are models for us to incorporate as we shepherd and serve one another.

Because we are all following and serving the same Master.

As we follow after, behave like, and start to think like Christ, we begin to see that the heart of the church is the commitment of its members to Christ. Now this commitment is revealed by how well we can rest or abide in Christ. Abiding in Christ is the giving up of ourselves to be ruled, to be taught, and to be led by Christ. Our ability to trust him, then, is indicative of our commitment to Him, and it is in this condition of submission that we find rest.

Now, this rest is the peace of God.

It is an internal calmness based on confidence in Christ's leadership in our lives, and the amazing beauty of this rest is that the less we think we have to bring to him, the greater our trust in him to supply what is needed. Conversely, the more we believe we have to bring to him, the less we trust him and need Him. So, abiding in Christ is meant for the weak and is very well suited to our weakness.

Abiding, then, is simply our weakness trusting itself to our Father in heaven and our Lord Christ Jesus to keep us, and it is in this condition of submission by consenting to let him do all things for us to do all things in us and to do all things through us, and that is why the heart of the church is the commitment of its members to Christ. Now if that's true, if the heart of the church is the commitment of its members to Christ, then the commitment to love one another as Christ loves us reveals how effective we are as that church.

Now the church we meet with are the brethren God has provided for us. We are a gift from God to each of us. You are God's provision for me, even as I may be God's provision for you, and three of the ways that we can show our love for each other are serving one another, encouraging one another, and forgiving one another. So let's take a look at serving one another first.

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Now Jesus said in John 13:34, I give you a new commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. You should also love one another. Now the question all of us really ask and face is what does this love look and act like so that I might do it?

Now the following two slides and the four verses in them are a chronological combination from Luke and John regarding the upper room convers. So let's read the four verses. Luke 22:24 and there was a dispute among them as to which of them seems to be Greater. In John 13:3 Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and went to God, he rose up from supper and laid aside his garments, and he took a towel and girded himself. After that he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet and to wipe him with the towel with which he was girded.

In Luke 12:22 27 the third verse for which is the graver, he who reclines or he who serves? Is it not he who declines? But I'm among you is he who serves, and then John 13:14 if then I, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you.

Truly, truly I say to you. A servant is not greater than his master. Neither is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. The world believes and teaches that we will be happy when we are successful in getting other people to serve us.

The Lord Jesus teaches just the opposite. We will be fulfilled when we learn to practice serving Love to others Serving or servanthood is a mindset. It's an attitude. It's a choice. It's a perspective that is in our power to choose or to ignore.

And Paul reminds us our goal as followers of Christ is Philippians 2. 5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

So what does it mean to serve one another? Now remember John 13:3 was highlighted or underlined in the previous slides. Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and went to God. So Jesus knew that his life was secure in His Father's hands and because he knew this and he believed this, he could focus on others and not be self centered. When we live self centered, self protected lives effectively, we are denying that we have a loving and powerful Father in heaven.

When Jesus reproves us for being consumed with anxiety over material things, that was our theme text yesterday. It is because we have a Father who loves us and has pledged to take care of us. The realization of that fact allows us to shift our focus off of myself and onto others when we believe. When I believe God will take care of me, then I and we can begin to think about how God may want to work with me to help and bless others, and Paul reminds us in Philippians 2:4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Now responding to the opportunities of service we are presented brings blessings to our lives. But we must also bestow thought on one another with a view to arousing one another to brotherly love and right conduct. As Hebrews 10:24, serving one another means to consider how God can use me to bless others, then prayerfully meditate on how we might influence others for good and then to cooperate with God in this process.

Now we need to be very careful that we don't fall out of servanthood and into servility. Servility simply means to be meanly or cravenly submissive. We fall into servility because we feel we have

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to serve, not because we want to serve. Now we're all selfish to some extent and our selfishness can distort many of the things that we do. When it comes to service, we may do the bare minimum within the sphere of our responsibilities.

We will do as little as possible to get by outside of those responsibilities to get by we don't want to be inconvenienced. God tests our motives for service and unfortunately I think we can all admit to the giving to get attitude servicing. Occasionally in our lives we are called on to give without strengths, trusting God to provide for us greater blessings than we could ever receive by mere repayment. God promises to bless us as we give ourselves away to others for Jesus sake. God dictates the timing and he dictates the terms.

Our part is simply to trust him by giving freedom now. Sometimes highly gifted or very spiritually.

Excuse me, I gotta catch up.

Sometimes highly gifted or talented Christians may serve with a prima donna attitude. They have it all together and they don't need help from others. Most of us, however, disqualify ourselves from service because we can't do what the gifted ones can do. Our Father rebukes both the prima donna as well as those who believe we have nothing to contribute. Proper humility has two components.

One is that we allow God to help us through others, and secondly, that we assume responsibility to make the contribution that God wants us to make.

Sometimes we serve to be accepted by others and not because we are already accepted by God. We are in it to get more than to give. This affects how we relate to and how we deal with one another. We may not reprove when needed for fear that they will reject us. We may be angry when our efforts aren't appreciated.

He made it jealous of others because they receive the respect that we're craving. We may avoid personal responsibility and personal vulnerability because admitting our struggles, our mistakes, our failures and weaknesses might cause others to think less of us and we want to be well thought of. It can be very painful to see the selfishness in our own hearts. We may tend to withdraw from service until we can purify our motives, and that conclusion, or this medicine, is worse than the disease itself because the very opposite of service defaults to selfishness.

And the antidote to selfishness is service. God wants us to continue serving others while we work with him to cleanse our hearts and our motives, but still serve. Now, spiritual maturity is not learning to avoid this conflict in our lives. It is about learning to trust the leadership and the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and still serve despite our fear, our aversion, our inadequacies, or even our selfishness. Maturity is paying more attention to the spiritual and less to the natural.

So service is easier when we remember three simple things. God works all things for good. Romans 8:28 God provides resources for us to serve with. Colossians 1:29 and God always honors his servants. Second Timothy 4:6 8.

Now the second way we can show our love for each other is by encouraging one another first. Thessalonians 5:11 says, Therefore comfort one another and edify one another, even as you also do now. Following Christ is life of battle against the world, the flesh, and the adversary. Biblical encouragement communicates God's truth and his love in ways that strengthen us to go on

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following God's will for our lives. Encouragement is a very powerful influence in our lives.

We are strengthened spiritually to continue in our walk with him when we receive God's encouragement and respond properly to it. Now God is the ultimate source of encouragement, even though this encouragement comes to us through each other. While it is true that God can and does encourage us directly, he often uses our brethren as the vehicle for his encouragement. As we express our love to each other through encouraging each other, we become the instruments through which God exercises His will. Now there are four ways that we can encourage each other.

The first one is that we can affirm one another's potential. We all struggle to some degree with thoughts and feelings of worthlessness. Even the most confident struggle when they experience failure. Our Father knows we need this type of encouragement. That's why we need to express this affirmation of your potential to others.

Another way is by recognizing spiritual accomplishments. The desire to hear someone say well done is instilled by God. The primary motivator for employees above salary, working conditions and meaningful work is recognition by the supervisors for job well done. Encouragement to recognition is a very important expression of love that we should be able to effectively communicate. Young Christians thrive on this recognition primarily because they are so aware of their biblical ignorance, their awkwardness in prayer, or of how much they have to grow that they don't see the significant progress that they already are making.

Mature Christians are often energized by the enthusiasm, zeal, the willingness to share, and the excitement about learning that the young in Christ brings. Mature followers can also be built up when we communicate to them our appreciation for their faithfulness, appreciation for their wisdom, and for their experience. Sometimes God tests our commitment to him by asking us to serve without such recognition or without any encouragement. But he will also communicate his gratitude for our fellowship, his service, ministry, and our walk to us in some way.

Now, by communicating God's faithfulness, God does not spare us the pain of this sinful world. Horrible things happen to all of us. God reveals new depths to our sins, our sinfulness. Loved ones die, relationships and marriages may end, and when these things happen, we can point them to our Father in heaven, who understands completely and has compassion far beyond our expectations.

When we remind others promises in God's Word relating to their experiences, God uses our words and our efforts to revive them by challenging one another to continue despite their pain fears. Now, endurance and perseverance are necessary for those who want to be successful, and this kind of encouragement motivates us to stick it out. Unfortunately, sometimes we need our brethren to be brutally honest with us. We need to be told to quit whining, stand up, suck it up, get back in the race. We need to be reminded that it is our privilege and it's our responsibility to suffer for Christ.

Other times we may have had the spiritual wind knocked out of us because of our experiences and being a gentler, a kinder encouragement to help us catch our breath, to help us collect our bearings and to be sent on our way. Pressing on so how can we effectively encourage? There are several ways. First, receive it yourself. To be effective in giving, we must first need to know how to receive it.

So to be able to receive encouragement, pray for the attitude of thankfulness, for humility, and for the ability to receive graciously. Another way is to trust God to encourage you in his way and in his timing. God knows best how and when to encourage us, and no amount of pressure on my part is

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ever going to force God's hand. Instead, we need to keep ourselves in the scripturally defined environment in which he works so that we can be encouraged.

And when we choose to patiently endure on our watch, God will prove his faithfulness. Encouraging us Another way is to know and use God's Word. It's God's Word that encourages his people by giving them the insight they need and by challenging them to trust God in practical ways. Another way is to study and meditate and how to encourage each other.

This usually requires careful and prayerful forethought. If we want to effectively encourage when we are present with these people, we must be reflecting on such things. When we are absent from them, we need to pay attention to others. The better we are at listening, the more we will be able to discern what kind of encouragement we need. Because we demonstrate our love and respect, because we listen, the encouragement we give when offered might be better accepted.

So let's look at the third way that we can forgive our love for each other, and that is forgiveness.

So let's consider forgiving one another.

Now Ephesians 4:32 says, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.

Yesterday we talked a little bit about business during the fellowship time. Bitterness is the alternative to forgiveness. Bitterness is a prolonged retributive anger towards another because of an offense that's been committed, and that's important to note that the offense is the occasion of bitterness. It is never the cause.

Bitterness is a chosen response to an offense, the occasion the offense happened, but how it's dealt with is a choice. Bitterness is a chosen response. That is why two individuals can experience similar situations and they can look at it from totally different perspectives. One chooses to respond properly and the other chooses to not respond properly.

Bitter people believe they have the right to pay people back for their offense. Somebody must pay for hurting me. While this conviction may be correct, it's wrong for us to assume to ourselves that right. It's exact retribution because God reserves this right for Himself. When we choose to get even, we have taken upon ourselves something that belongs only to God.

Besides the emotional and relational consequences of bitterness, there's also spiritual consequences as well. Bitterness reduces spiritual clarity because bitterness is hypocritical. Not only is it hypercritical, it's also hypocritical, and this is what John says in First John 2, 9, 11 he who says he's in the light and hates his brother is in darkness, and until now, he who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no offense in him.

But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness and does not know where he is going because darkness has blinded his eyes. When we retain our right to hate or our right to vengeance, or we choose to be bitter, we forfeit the privilege of God's mercy and his forgiveness.

Now, there are two main barriers to forgiveness. The first one is our own unwillingness, and the second one is that we just may not understand what biblical forgiveness really is. So let's talk about biblical forgiveness. Biblical forgiveness insists on personal moral responsibility.

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It transfers retribution to whom it rightfully belongs to God. Forgiveness is based on truth, not on feelings. Forgiveness is a process. It is much more than just a specific point in time action. It may take some time to get to that point of forgiveness.

We know that when God forgives us of our sin, he will not use them as the basis for rejecting or condemning us in the future.

Forgiveness waives the right to focus on past offenses, and it chooses not to use those offenses against the one being forgiven in any way in the future. God removes our sin from us when we ask him as far as the east is from the west, and tell me where is east, and tell me where is west. We can find north, we can find south, but you cannot find east or west. Forgiveness relates to past offenses. Trust relates to the present, and forgiveness allows the offender to rebuild responsible trust.

Now, it's important to note that forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Forgiveness is one sided unilateral. Reconciliation is two sided bilateral. Sometimes we think that forgiveness is a sign of weakness. Forgiveness does not tolerate future injury.

And extending forgiveness does not mean that we have to let someone take advantage of that forgiveness. Forgiveness is an expression of love, and the very love that extends forgiveness also extends discipline.

And when we forgive scripturally, we are modeling how to do it and what it looks like. In essence, our forgiveness opens the door for others to forgive also. Now our service is titled Shepherding in Practice. It's quite easy to discern that encouraging and serving one another is something shepherds do. But is forgiveness a shepherding trait?

Do you think forgiveness is a shepherding trait? My answer is yes, it is simply because shepherds lead by example and the Lord Jesus teaches us to and requires us to forgive.

So let's conclude, abiding in Christ is trusting him to keep us, and our degree of trust in him indicates the level of our commitment to Him, and it is in this condition of trusting that the heart of the church, the commitment of its members to Christ, is revealed. We can love one another deeply by showing our love through sincere service. We can encourage each other by recognizing each other's spiritual accomplishments, by communicating God's faithfulness, and by challenging each of us to continue in our service and in our walk.

Forgiveness imitates Christ. Forgiveness prevents emotional, relational and spiritual consequences, and forgiveness lets God control retribution. When we serve one another, when we encourage one another, and when we forgive one another, we demonstrate that our effectiveness as the church is because of our commitment to love one another as Christ loves us. So as we consider how to shepherd one another, we should start most likely with prayer.

We want to lift each up individually and all of us collectively as a body of this people want to ask in prayer that we might each grow in righteousness, in service and in sacrifice, then we must do something. We must take the initiative and do it. We must serve, we must encourage, we must forgive. As we do these things, we are acting as Christ would and shepherding the flock that we are blessed to associate with in our last slide, and perhaps one that's something we should always keep in mind when we are serving one another and in our relationships with one another, that it is always better to be righteous than it is to be right.