

Leaders and the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Dear Jessica, you've asked me to stop writing these letters. You've told me they will never change things between us. But I can't, Jessica.

I can't just let you go. Even Darth Vader, an evil Sith Lord, couldn't leave his son to die at the end of Return of the Jedi.

You make me feel so safe, Jessica. So warm. I want to curl up next to you like Luke Skywalker curled up next to his spaceship to protect himself from the sub-zero temperatures of the Hoth where the Rebel Alliance was hiding from the Galactic Empire.

Jessica, can't you see I love you almost as much as Star Wars? Love, Gary. So if you're new to Watermark and you've just heard that, you might be asking yourself, what is that all about?

What does it have to do with a sermon? And where am I? Am I in church or am I in a Star Wars premiere? So for those of you who don't know me, my name is Graham. I'm one of the elders here at Watermark.

[1 : 08] And today we begin studying a letter, a letter called Titus. Now whenever you get a letter, a letter is kind of written between two parties.

One party sends it to another. And if you're not either one of those parties and you get to read that letter, it's almost like you have to do a little bit of detective work, right?

A little bit of reading between the lines to get the most out of it, right? So for example, in the letter we just read, we kind of get an idea that this guy Gary, he's got a crush on a girl called Jessica who has no interest in him.

And Gary has a little bit of a weird obsession with Star Wars. And if I was a father, I would also tell Jessica, have no interest in Gary. But it's kind of like you have to do that little bit of detective work.

And that's what we do when we look at Titus. It might interest you to know that over 80% of the New Testament is written in the form of letters.

[2 : 14] And letters are incredibly personal. It's like God was saying to his bride, this is my letter to you. There's something special and personal about it.

But as we read it, we need to ask ourselves some questions. So we ask ourselves, and this is good for Bible study when you do it on your own. If you're starting a new letter, you ask yourself, well, why was the letter written?

Who was, in this case, who was Titus? What was he being asked to do? What was the church like in Crete? What was the culture like in Crete that this letter needed to be written?

And as we study this letter and we go through it over the next series, these questions become apparent. And they illuminate what was going on and they illuminate who God is behind the whole thing.

So as Paul begins this letter, he introduces himself as two things. He says, I'm a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ.

[3 : 14] Now, to call yourself a servant implies that you serve someone greater than yourself. You take your orders and your instructions from someone higher than you.

In most cultures in the world, servants are not highly esteemed, right? It's really kind of maybe it's much better to be served and kind of maybe nice to have a servant yourself.

But to be a servant, maybe not so much. But here Paul says, he says, I serve God. And that changes everything.

You know, if you met someone and they said, oh, I'm a servant of Graham Smith, you're probably, uh-huh, okay. But if you met someone and they said, I'm a servant of C.Y. Leung, maybe you'd be a little bit more interested.

Okay, oh, I'd like to ask you some questions. Or maybe someone said, oh, I'm a servant of Lionel Messi. And you go, wow, that is awesome. What is he like? I do that job for free.

[4 : 22] It changes who you serve, the whole identity of being a servant. And Paul's saying, I serve God. This is a huge honor.

It's a huge privilege. I get to serve the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the God who created everything. But here's the thing. If you claim to serve God, by implication, it means you serve others.

If someone says, I serve God, the way you're going to see that is how they serve others. And at Watermark, our goal is to be a serving church.

We don't want to be a church where we come and we just spectate and we watch a good show. We want to be a church that serves each other and serves God.

One thing that will do is it will strengthen your relationships with each other, but it will also strengthen your relationship with the Lord when you begin to see what He does as you serve others.

[5 : 28] So he calls himself a servant. And then he goes on to say, I am an apostle. I'm sent by Jesus Christ. Now, apostle literally just means sent one.

And it's kind of like Paul saying, I am an ambassador of the gospel. So in society, if a servant is at the lowest end of society, an ambassador is at the highest end of society.

And here you get a picture of a Christian's concern for the whole of society. We care about the servants and we care about the ambassadors. From the highest to the lowest, from the great to the small, from the rich to the poor, a Christian has a concern for the whole of society.

You know, I kind of love being in a church because I find all kind of social distinctions vanish. Right? I mean, I have a privilege. I kind of elevated today and I kind of look down and I'm just looking at you.

Actually, we're quite a strange bunch. You know, the Lord calls us a peculiar people. I get to see it. Right? So, I mean, we have sitting here today, we have lawyers, bankers, teachers, servants, doctors.

[6 : 43] I mean, we even have Australians sitting here. But the reason that is possible is because we are one in Christ.

We all serve the same God and we're all ambassadors of the same gospel. Do you realize that when you walk into your home, your school, your university, your place of work, you are an ambassador for the gospel?

You represent the gospel. The Bible calls us a living letter to be read by all. And he tells Titus, he tells Titus, I've got this mission, Titus.

This is what I'm here for, Titus. I'm here to further the faith of God's elect. Now, faith is not a once-off thing, right?

So, most people, when you ask them, do you have faith? They mean, yeah, 20 years ago, I believed in Jesus. That's where I put my faith. But faith, it grows, it matures, it's active, right?

[7 : 59] So, the more you know and the more you trust Jesus, the more your faith grows, right? And faith is being sure of what is unseen.

But the more you trust Him, the more you grow, the more you exercise your faith, the more you become sure about what is unseen. And Paul's saying, Titus, I'm here to move God's people on.

I don't want them to just stand there and rest in the faith they had when they first believed in Jesus. I want to take them on. And you know, as I was preparing for this, this is the verse that got me.

Because I got to thinking about myself. And I thought, you know, when is the last time that I exercised my faith, that I trust my faith, that kind of I put myself in a situation where I said, God, if you do not come through for me, I'm going to fall flat in my face.

And I have to be honest with you, it was a lot longer ago than I would have liked. But here's a question for you. When is the last time you stretched your faith?

[9 : 14] One of our goals at Watermark and our values is this. This is what we state. We say, our goal is to help people take their next step to becoming fully functioning followers of Christ. Christ. It's exactly the same thing. We want people to further their faith. Take the next step in trusting Jesus in their walk. And he gives Titus this thing.

He says, this is how it's going to happen. If you want people to extend their faith, you know what you need? You need a knowledge of the truth. And he has an interesting thing about truth.

Truth is either learned or lived. Paul's saying, Titus, we need to grow truth in people, right?

And now here's the thing. Truth is a person. Truth is Jesus. And Jesus spoke and taught absolute truth.

[10 : 14] Now, we live in a society, and it's around the world, that people do not like absolute truth. Right? Right? It's a relative truth.

Right? What's true for you is true for you. If you want to believe that's red when it's really blue, that's fine for you. But this is the thing.

When you start to embrace relative truth, it leads to confusion. Right? It's true for you. It might be true. I don't know if it's true for me. It could be true for me. I don't know if it's true. We're all confused.

But Jesus comes, and He teaches absolute truth. And there is a desperate cry in this city for absolute truth.

My challenge to you this week, read the newspaper, read the South China Morning Post, and you will see again and again there is confusion about what is right and what is wrong.

[11 : 11] There is a desperate cry for absolute truth. Do you know what the most offensive thing Jesus ever said was? And if you think Jesus never said anything offensive, He was always kind of mellow, this nice, tame guy, you have not read the Gospels because He said some pretty offensive things to people.

But this was the most offensive thing He said. He said, I am the way, the truth, the life. Now, if Jesus had said, I am a way, a truth, a life, no problem.

Hey, Jesus, join the pantheon of all the other religions. We'll just put you in there, and you can kind of pick and choose, maybe a pick and mix. That's fine. But Jesus came along, and He said, I am the way.

I'm exclusive. I'm unique. But here's the thing, right? Absolute truth. Rather than leading to confusion of relative truth, absolute truth leads to confidence and to being sure.

The Bible speaks of standing firm, right? And when you stand firm, your knowledge of truth has grown. Your faith is beginning to be exercised.

[12 : 29] Something will happen in your life called godliness. Because the more truth we know, the more it affects the way we live.

What you believe affects how you behave. And that's true for everybody across the planet. What you believe affects how you behave.

And because this is true, it changes me, and it changes you. And here's the thing, right? As truth, we hear it.

We hear it taught. It impacts our lives. It changes us. There's this desire to live for God. The Spirit inside us tells us to live for Him, and we begin to change. Right?

Maybe we've come from the worst of the worst, and Christ begins to change us, and we become good, and then we become godly. And then you meet opposition, because the world does not like godliness.

[13 : 32] The world kind of is okay with goodness, because it kind of pays to be good, and you've got a little bit of self-interest in if everyone's good, then that's okay. But godliness? Godliness is different, because godliness reminds people that there is a God that they will be accountable to one day.

And you will face all sorts of trials and tribulations. Paul said, but it doesn't end there. It doesn't end there, because with godliness, the next step to think, to take hold of, is the hope of eternal life.

The hope of eternal life. You see, in English, the word hope has been very much misused, right? We use the word, I hope it doesn't rain.

Well, in Hong Kong, that's not likely, right? It's going to rain all the time. But it's kind of like wishful thinking. But in a biblical sense, hope is to be sure.

God promised it, right? The God who never lies. I wonder if you've thought about that. The God who never lies. You know, we just take it for granted that God doesn't lie, probably because we lie so much.

[14 : 41] But God never lies, and He promised this thing called the hope of eternal life. So I've got something here, which I dropped down there.

Okay. So I want you, for a second, to imagine that this rope represents your existence as a believer.

Okay. And I want you to imagine it just goes on and on and on. It never, never ends. It kind of goes out the stage, down the road, through Hong Kong, through Poc Fulam, and on and on and on.

It never, never, never ends. That's your existence as a believer. But this little black bit right here, this represents your time here and now, in this life.

If we do not have a perspective of faith and hope and truth, our focus becomes this little black bit right here. And we kind of view this is all of it, it's all what it's about.

[15 : 56] But, and you know, maybe this little part, you know, okay, I get to there, and I'm going to go to university. I'm going to work really hard, get a good degree. Then maybe marry, have some kids, and then I really have to work hard.

You know, got to save for education, retirement. And then I'm going to get to about this little bit here. And I'm going to retire, and I'm really going to enjoy this little bit here. That's what our life becomes.

I've thought that way, right? Just a little thing. Paul's saying, get a perspective. The hope of eternal life. I can say this with all surety.

The best possible day that you experience in this little black bit, the best possible day, will not compare to all of that. Because in all of that, we get to see Jesus face to face.

There will be no tears. There will be no war. There will be no disease. There will be no bad bosses. There will be no worry. Guys, I know we're in church. But we are allowed to get a little bit excited.

[16 : 59] That's pretty awesome stuff, right? What we have to look forward to. So someone can shout hallelujah. That's pretty good, right? But that's amazing, right? So Paul's saying, get this view.

Get this view. Whatever we face in this life. Whatever struggles we endure, we can overcome because of the hope that we have.

This hope puts this into perspective. This hope of eternal life puts this little life into perspective. That's what Paul's saying.

One of the key words you're going to come across again and again in the book of Titus is the word Savior. God is our Savior.

It's all God's idea, right? He planned it and He sent His Son. And if we kind of look back, Paul has just given us in a few verses, he's given us the gospel.

[18 : 02] He says, through faith, you will be free from the penalty of sin. Through truth, you will be free from the power of sin. And through hope, one day we will be free from the presence of sin.

He's given us the gospel, the great hope. And he says, Titus, this is my mission. This is what I'm here for. This is why I exist. But here's a beautiful little thing, right?

That little detective work as you read the letter. There's this lovely little phrase that says, my true son in common faith. Not only does the gospel change the way we live, but it changes the way we relate.

My true son. Because we both know Jesus, it's kind of like we have been brought together in this family.

It is now, it's not a pretend thing. It's as if you really are my father and it's as if you really are my son. I, this past summer holiday, my family and I, we had, we were very privileged and blessed to be able to go back to the promised land, South Africa.

[19 : 14] And in the promised land, we got to spend time with my family. And we loved it, right? It was great having grandparents around for the kids. And my family have known me my whole life.

I hope so. But they have. And it was really good. But my family are not believers yet. I hope they will be, right? We're praying for them.

But they're not believers. And there's just something missing. It's like we see the world through different eyes. We see people through different eyes.

We see this life through distant eyes. There's just something missing. And, you know, I can come back to Hong Kong and I can meet someone who I've known for two months.

But because we share this common faith, this common thing, hey, we have the same dad. We are brothers. It's something different, right? There's a depth there that comes with knowing Jesus is how we relate to one another.

[20 : 17] You know, at Watermark, we constantly emphasize and stress this word community. But it's the exact same thing. It's family, right? It's what we want to create.

It's God's idea. And, yes, family gets messy. We offend each other. We disappoint each other. But through it all, we keep loving each other and we stay close together.

That's Paul saying, right? Beautiful. The gospel does this for us. So, Titus was pretty special to Paul. And Titus was someone Paul could trust with a difficult situation.

He was kind of like Paul's troubleshooter. Titus, I've got a problem in the church over there. Do you mind going sorting that out? And Titus was kind of this guy who's very, very good at taking the lead, right?

He did it. So, it's kind of great to have these kind of people in your life. So, here's a question. If you needed help with a difficult situation, who would you call?

[21 : 21] Think about that. You had help. If you needed help with a difficult situation, who's the first person you call? That is your Titus.

Okay? So, we're doing a little bit of digging here. And we kind of read between the lines and we get the sense that Paul gave Titus the specific mission. He said, Titus, I want you to appoint elders.

And we kind of see a little bit more that Titus was in a place called Crete. Right? So, when you think of Crete today, you probably think of an amazing holiday and beautiful beaches.

So, it's kind of like if I said, you know, if you say a place, how it brings to mind the place and the people. So, example, if I said Singapore, right?

You'd be thinking, wow, okay. It's hot all the time. Amazing crab curry. People say la, a lot la, okay la, can, cannot la. You know, maybe if I said New Zealand, you go, where is that again, right?

[22 : 26] Oh, yes, that tiny little place, bottom of the world, a lot of sheep. Yeah, okay. So, anyway, you get the point, right? It brought to mind what the place was like.

But in that time, if you said the name Crete, people would have gone, oh, no. Oh, no, not Crete. Because the Cretans had this terribly bad reputation.

There was actually a verb that came out of it, to cretinize, which meant to lie and deceive in matters of honesty. And even one of their own philosophers from their own people, he's looking out at his people and he says this.

He goes, Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons. And Cicero, another philosopher, is looking at the Cretans and he says, only Cretans consider highway robbery an honorable profession.

So, these people were dishonest, lazy, indulgent, and they didn't care how they got their money, as long as they got their money, right? The more you deceive, the more money you got, the better you were.

[23 : 37] So, can you imagine trying to start a church in that situation, right? So, people who had been liars, cheats, deceivers were coming into the church, and that created all sorts of problems, right?

And the Lord's people were surrounded by this culture, and it brought with it lots of pressure and temptation. The same as us, right?

We live with the pressure of the culture around us. And Paul says, What you're going to need to overcome is you're going to need men of certain qualities to love and lead the church.

And kind of reading between the lines, you get the picture that the qualities needed, we're going to read about them now, are the exact opposite to the qualities that were lived out in the culture.

So, I want to say two quick things about eldership, okay? Just a little side note here. Two quick things about eldership. One, eldership is pleuristic.

[24 : 45] It says, appoint elders. Okay, it's not one elder, it's pleuristic elders in a church. Now, there is a very good reason for that.

If you have one elder, whether we like it or not, we all have strengths and weaknesses. But if you just have one person, the church will then pick up the strengths and weaknesses of that person.

They'll pick up the traditions of that person. They will pick up the bias of that person. But if you have a pleuristic eldership, you protect against all those things.

You iron out the weaknesses. One, you have more people to care for the flock. But you have collective wisdom as well, and you protect against bias.

But the most important thing is if you have pleuristic eldership, the attention is exactly where it should be. The attention is on Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Because if it's one man, our tendency is to focus on one person.

[25 : 51] Pleuristic eldership points to Jesus. And that's why at Watermark, we practice pleuristic eldership. Second point, with elders, they were appointed.

Okay, they're not voted in. It's not the nicest or the most popular person that gets it. But it's someone who displays certain qualities. And those qualities are recognized by all.

Now, that takes time. Right? When Paul planted a church, he didn't plant a church, have new converts, appoint elders. He would either stay there a while and wait until elders matured and saw who they were and then appoint them.

Or he went away and 12 months later would come back and appoint elders. And in this case, he sent Titus to do it. So it does take time. At Watermark, what we like to do is we look at people.

We see those qualities coming out. We see people serving as elders in what they do and who they are. And then we invite them on to an eldership training time where we spend time in the Word.

[27 : 01] We spend time looking at the expectations of an elder, the pressures of an elder. And then we invite them into the elders meeting. Right? Bring them into how we study God's Word together.

How we pray for each other. How we pray for the church. And if that time is right and we've prayerfully considered, we then present the prospective elders to the church.

And then the church has an opportunity to see whether those qualities are true about that person and have an opportunity to respond. And if that's right, then we appoint the elders.

So it takes time. And at the process, we're in that process at the moment at Watermark. So here are the qualities of an elder. Okay, I've called them the three D's of eldership.

Okay, so if you're taking note, the three D's of eldership. His domestic qualities. What is he like at home and with his family? His diplomatic qualities.

[27 : 59] What is he like with other people? And third, his doctrinal qualities. What is he like with the Gospel and the Word of God? Okay, the three D's of eldership. Here they are.

Domestic. At home and with his family. If you really want to get to know what someone's like, spend time with them when they're with their family.

Right? Not on a nice service on a Sunday where everyone's putting their best foot forward. But spend time with them when they're with their family. Spend time with the people that they spend most of their time with.

Right? Because you kind of see the first test of a minister is how you minister at home. How do you love and lead at home will determine how you will love and lead within the church.

It says here, he is to be faithful to his wife. Now that means he is a one woman man.

[28 : 59] Right? He doesn't mess around with other women. He doesn't flirt with other women. He makes his wife feel loved and secure and like a princess. Okay, good.

Wives, I hope you're nudging your husbands in the ribs. Right? That's what I'm seeing up here. Make her feel like a princess, guys. I almost said a prisoner. But okay. Princess.

Princess. That's where the focus is. Okay. Make her feel like a princess. Princess. Years ago, I went to a Christian conference, right?

And we had one of the celebrity preachers coming and talking. And anyway, after he had just spoken, I went to my pastor and I said, what do you think of Mr. X?

And this is what he said. He said, I'll tell you when I've met his wife. And I didn't understand that. What? What does his wife have to do with it, right?

[29 : 57] But actually, it was a very profound thing. You really want to see what someone's like? See what their wife's like. See how he treats his wife. Children.

This one scares me personally. Man whose children believe are trustworthy and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Okay.

It cannot mean that you force your faith onto your children. God has sons and daughters. He does not have grandsons or granddaughters. You do not force your faith onto them.

But as parents, we are constantly pointing our children to Christ. You know, these, your kids are the people that you have most influence over, most authority over.

If you are influencing them for God and the gospel, you will see fruit, right? So we do have a responsibility as parents to train our kids in the way that they should go.

[30 : 57] So, I work in education, right? So the word believe can actually be trustworthy, right?

And I see it, unfortunately, happening all the time where parents are constantly trying to maximize their children's academic potential or their academic opportunities.

And they build this massive CV, right? I mean, I'm not kidding you. Like, I've seen five-year-old CVs which are bigger than mine, you know, and they've only been alive five years. I don't know how they do it.

But they have this massive CV, and it's all about their education. And we just forget about character. We forget about character. And Paul's saying, don't forget about character.

Make them trustworthy. We build that righteousness into them. And there's another verse. It goes on to say, the charge of being wild and disobedient.

[31 : 57] So actually, the Greek word here means riot, okay, which implies self-indulgence or even reckless expenditure.

So, unable to save. It's the same word in Luke 15 with the parable of the prodigal son of reckless spending. I mean, isn't it amazing?

Paul is talking about raising kids, and he says, one of the vital things is how you teach them the value of money. How to teach them to be responsible and value money.

Where is the first place that children will see the value of money and things? They'll see it in their parents. Little kids will watch their parents to see whether they are generous, whether they're tight-fisted, whether they're responsible with what they earn, whether they're transparent with their money.

And then as your kids grow a little bit older, parents begin to entrust money to the kids, to let them experience the value of it.

[33 : 06] I have a friend in Singapore. His name is, he's a pastor in Singapore called Simon Murphy. And Simon and I know each other because we went to church together in South Africa.

And when Simon turned 13, his mother was very, very firm on this idea. So, Simon turns 13. His mother calls him in. Happy birthday.

Right. From now on, we believe you're 13, and you should be responsible for getting certain items on your own. So, here's your allowance. Right?

You're responsible for buying certain things on your own now. In a month's time, I want you to come to me and show me your receipts, and I want you to present to me a budget for the next month.

And Simon's like, what, Mom? You know, are you crazy? But a month later, Simon walked to his mom and said, yeah, Mom, this is what I spent it on, and here's my budget for the next month. And she looked at it, and she said, oh, very nice, Simon.

[34 : 05] Here's your allowance for the next month. For the next five years, from the age of 13 to the age of 18, every month, Simon had to present a budget to his mother of how he was spending his money.

He hated it, right? And his friends laughed at him. But here's the interesting thing, right? When I spoke to Simon, he said that when he went to university, one of the things that set him apart was his understanding of the value of money.

Because he noticed that other 18, 19-year-olds had no idea how to handle money or the value of money or the danger or the deception of money. It comes from parents, right?

So those are the domestic qualities of an elder, right? The one thing it does imply is that an elder spends time with their family.

So it's one of the first questions we ask. How do you spend time with your family? Do you spend time with your family? Okay. Diplomatic qualities. Dealing with other people.

[35 : 10] The word here is a steward. A steward of God's flock. You're looking after God's property. So he says an elder is to be blameless, right?

So what does that mean? Blameless? And he kind of gives this list. It's a little bit of a negative list. And he says this. He says they're to be blameless. Not overbearing. Not controlling. Not quick-tempered.

You don't get angry easy. Not given to drunkenness. Doesn't mean an elder doesn't drink, but it does mean they don't get drunk. They're not violent. Not violent with their fists, with their words, with the way they speak or the way they act.

Not pursuing dishonest gain, right? The culture around them said get money any way you want. An elder is to not pursue dishonest gain.

So if you see any of those things, probably not the person you want leading the church. It says rather an elder must be hospitable, care for people, open your home to people.

[36 : 08] One who loves what is good. Isn't it nice to be around people who love what is good? No, like it's good. It's really, you can tell a difference. You're around someone who's good.

It kind of affects you as well. Self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. Look for those qualities. Doctrine.

It says he must hold firmly to the trustworthy message. The gospel is to be his rock. He doesn't add to it.

He doesn't change it. He doesn't try to improve on it. He takes the message of the gospel, and he's faithful to it. And if that is true, it leads to sound doctrine. And when you have sound doctrine, you can encourage others by it.

Now, encourage literally means to put courage into you. Encourage is to put courage into you. And that's what sound doctrine will do.

[37 : 08] It will give you courage. But here's the other side, right? And this is the side I don't like so much. It says, refute those who oppose it. Okay, I would personally, and I'm sure everyone else that preaches at Watermark, I'd love to just preach on what is true and what is just and ignore what is destructive, right?

But to truly love the church and to truly care for people, we sometimes need to warn and correct and refute false thinking, right?

Because from the early church to now, people will always come in and they try to change the gospel. They try to make it better, right? We all get to heaven, live any way you want.

Or they kind of come up with this, here's a whole list of man-made rules that you need to follow. So, that needs to be refuted, right? That is not the gospel. And it takes courage to be able to do that kind of thing.

So, I want you to notice that all of this that we've spoken about has to do with character, has to do with God's work within your heart.

[38 : 21] It is not about your intellect. It is not about your status in life. It is certainly not about how you look, but it is about your character.

What God has done in your heart. So, the most important question we could ask at this point is, why do we need elders?

Can't we just all kind of lead together? In that culture of Crete, there were bad leaders. And their whole intention and aim was to exploit and use people in the church for their own gain, right?

Maybe it was financial, they wanted money, or they wanted a little bit of attention, but that's what they wanted, right? And that kind of leadership destroys homes. It divides homes. It's just, it's terrible, right?

So, the cure for bad leaders is not no leaders, it's good leaders. Leaders who will love, protect, and encourage.

[39 : 28] The readers we have leaders is that we follow, right? We become like Christ who's leading us. So that we can all become a church who shows what our lives look like when we follow Jesus.

So that we can all become a church whose marriages show what it's like as Jesus loved His church.

Our marriages model that. So that we can all become a church that love, protect, and train our children. Which shows how Christ loves, protects, and trains us as His children.

And finally, so that we can all become a church that proclaim and protect the gospel. This is our most treasured possession, the gospel.

We could put on a great show Sunday after Sunday. Get a whole bunch of talented people. Maybe put on a feel-good, motivational message. But if we lose the gospel, we lose everything.

[40 : 41] Because a feel-good message, a good show, does not redeem and does not change. All this that we aspire to be, everything we've spoken about can be summarized in one word.

And the word is this. Pay attention. The word is love. Now love, in a Christian sense, is not a sentimental, soppy, pop song kind of love.

God did not look down at Graham Smith and say, Have you seen Graham? Isn't he great? He's just so lovable. No. No.

No. God looked down and what he saw was a sinful, prideful, arrogant person shaking his fist in God's face saying, I'll do it my way. He looked down and says, I care enough about him.

I love him enough that I am going to do something. Love, in a Christian sense, is a love of action and care. God came down to me and rescued me.

[41 : 48] That is, in Greek, the word is agape. Right? It was such a rare form of love that it was hardly ever used. But that's when Christians came on the scene.

They're like, wow, this is amazing. We've never seen this kind of love before. And they used the word agape for them. A love like this is infectious, right?

It affects us, our relationships. It changes us to want to be servants of each other and of God. And it reminds us that we are ambassadors of this wonderful good news, the gospel.

And Jesus said this. He said, you know how people are going to know that you belong to me, that you are my disciples? You know what's the one thing that people are going to see and they're going to say, wow, look at that?

Is that they love one another. And the word is agape, one another. They care for, they see a need, they act. It's not about giving each other a hug, okay?

[43 : 02] It's about seeing a need, acting, and caring. A genuine love for each other. So in this world where we have selfish, corrupt leaders, we have relevant truth, we have broken families, Jesus steps in and He redeems.

He brings us out of that and He puts us in a family where we will be loved and cared for. And then He goes on redeeming, redeeming, redeeming, and He's still redeeming today in my heart and in our hearts.

This is what He calls an unending, unfailing love. My hope, right, besides the hope of eternal life, my hope is that we hear this and we open the door to God.

And we say, God, come in. Change my heart. Let me experience that agape kind of care that you have. Let me see it and let me live it out for others.

So as we go this week, can I ask you to stand? I'm going to pray for us. Father, we come before you as your children.

[44 : 33] We come before you as your servants. We come before you crying, Abba, Father. Lord, we thank you for the gospel, what it does in our lives, how it gives us faith, how it teaches us truth, how it leads us to godliness.

And Lord, we thank you for the hope of eternal life. Lord, I pray, open my heart to what you have for me. Help me to trust you. Help me to let you in, Lord, and just deal with the things that I need to deal with.

Lord, I pray, remind all of us this morning of your redemption, the redemption story that you had for us at the beginning. And Lord, also the fact that you go on redeeming each and every one of us every day.

Lord, all we can do as your people is to say thank you. I pray, help us this week to really live out the gospel in this church.

Let us be a family, a community that loves each other with a love of action and care. Father, we're so grateful.

[45 : 45] We just say thank you to you, and we stand in awe of you. Amen.