

# Who Wants Church Leaders Anyway?

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Preacher: Kevin Murphy

- [ 0 : 00 ]     The scripture reading comes from the book of 1 Corinthians chapter 4. Please follow along on the bulletin, the screen, or your own Bible. Starting in verse 1, we read, This is how one should regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.
- Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. But with me, it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court.
- In fact, I do not even judge myself, for I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not therefore acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.
- Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.
- Then each one will receive his commendation from God. I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.
- [ 1 : 13 ]     For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?
- Although you have all you want, I'm sorry, already you have all you want. Already you have become rich. Without us, you have become kings. And with that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you.
- For I think that God has exhibited us, apostles, as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men.
- We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.
- To the present hour, we hunger and thirst. We are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. When we revile, we are blessed.
- [ 2 : 19 ]     When persecuted, we endure. When slandered, we entreat. We have become and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuge of all things.
- I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to acknowledge you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers.
- For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.
- Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills. And I will find out not the talk of those arrogant people, but their power.
- For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk, but in power. What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love, in the spirit of gentleness? This is the word of God.
- [ 3 : 27 ]     Okay, great. Thank you, Margo. Let's pray together as we come to this passage. Heavenly Father, thank you for your word. God, I confess, sometimes your word is hard to understand.

Sometimes it feels like, what relevance does this letter to Corinthians 2,000 years ago have to us today? God, won't you come and help us see not just what Paul is saying to Corinthians, but what you are saying to us.

God, I pray that you help us to be a church which is radically Christ-centered. God, come and crucify our pride, our self-sufficiency. Come and call us back to Christ in the gospel, we pray.

Lord, as your word, we pray that you will speak to us this morning. Lord, we pray that each one of us, you will speak to us from something from today, whether it's a line in a song, whether it's something from the scripture reading, the call to worship, the sermon, that in some way, God, you will speak to each one of us today.

We want to hear from you and take something from this morning that will go with us into this week and help us to hold on to Christ Jesus again. Amen. So God, I pray by your spirit, come and do that in your wonderful and gracious name.

[ 4 : 39 ]     Amen. Okay, I don't know how you feel about problem-solving puzzles like Rubik's cubes and things like that.

I saw Sebastian, I think a week or two ago. Sebastian is from Ebenezer here and is 100% blind. And Sebastian was solving a Rubik's cube by feeling the different textures of the different colors.

Is that right, Sebastian? Well, I must tell you, I don't know anything about Rubik's cubes. I've tried many times. I can't solve them. I have not cracked the code. I don't know how you feel about those kinds of problems and other problems like that.

Well, 1 Corinthians chapter 4 was a Rubik's cube to me this week. If you didn't understand anything Margo read while she was reading, that's how I felt Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of this week.

And I thought, what on earth is going on here? So let's see if we can make sense of this very difficult passage. 1 Corinthians chapter 4. What is Paul trying to say to the Corinthians?

[ 5 : 44 ]     And the question then is, what is God trying to say to us? Well, I think this is the big idea. Paul wants his readers to understand. He wants them to humbly receive the leaders that God has given them and to let these leaders help them, the Corinthians, to follow Jesus.

So Paul is saying to the Corinthians, God has given you leaders. Receive these leaders and let these leaders serve you by calling you to follow Jesus.

And if you think about that, isn't that what God would want to say to us? For us to humbly receive the leaders that he's given us and to let those leaders help us as a church to follow Jesus.

Now, you may automatically have an objection and say, well, that's very convenient for you to say, Kevin, because you are one of the leaders, right? That sounds like you're saying, hey, just shut up and follow me, right?

Well, good point. But I want to raise something. I am one of the leaders in the church, sure. But I'm also a member of the church.

[ 6 : 52 ]     In fact, my primary identity is as a member of the church, not as a leader. There is one primary head of Watermark Church. His name is Jesus. And the rest are primarily body.

And so even as elders and pastors, we have leaders called elders and pastors. And I, as I listen to this passage, need to receive the leaders that God has put in my life and help them to let them help me to follow Jesus.

The main thing that I need in my life is to follow Jesus. And God has given me these gifts called elders and pastors that help me to do that. Okay, so that's what I think the big idea is today.

God wants us to humbly receive the leaders he's given us and to allow them to help us follow Jesus. Now, you may say, oh, church of Egypt, here we go again.

Is there anything like more irrelevant and boring to my life? But I think there's two reasons why it's important for us to, why the Bible spends a lot of time talking about church leadership.

[ 7 : 55 ] The first is this. The Bible says that the church is not indispensable to one's Christian faith. And so it's easy for us to think, okay, it's me and Jesus.

That's all that really matters. But the Bible actually says the church, the Christian community around us, is a vital part of our Christian faith, of us following Jesus. And therefore, how the church is structured and how God brings the church into our lives is very important.

How we think about it is very important. But the second reason is this. If you've been around for more than a month in this world, you'll know of all the terrible stories of church abuse or church scandals or churches imploding that result from dodgy and bad leadership, right?

And so if we want the church to be healthy and strong, it's important that we understand what does the Bible have to say about church and how it's structured and church leadership. Okay, so in this passage, I think Paul's going to answer three questions.

Who do church leaders serve? Secondly, what do church leaders do? Okay, that's a good question. And thirdly, how do they actually do what they are called to do? So let's dive in and see how we can answer.

[ 9 : 05 ] So firstly, who do church leaders serve? In 1970, an academic called Robert Greenleaf coined a phrase in his seminal essay called The Servant as Leader.

He coined this now ubiquitous phrase, The Servant Leader. Okay? And for us, we yawn when we hear that idea. Servant Leader. Okay, we've all heard that concept. But in the 1970s, it was revolutionary and very new.

Everyone thought, this is amazing. Leaders are actually servants. Now, of course, that idea has been around for forever, right? I think the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, I don't know if that's how you say his name, 5th century BC, he spoke about servant leaders.

And of course, that's what the Apostle Paul is writing here. And so look what he says in verse 1 of our passage. I hope you've got your Bible or bulletin with you. He says, This is how one should regard us, apostles.

We are servants. Servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. And we must be found faithful. Okay? So that's similar to what we saw last week. Paul says, What are church leaders?

[ 10 : 12 ] We are servants. Okay? But servants of Christ. Then he says, So Paul says, We are servants.

But then he says, You think that he means, Okay, we are your servants. But actually, look at what he says. We are servants of Christ. We are Christ's servants. So Paul's telling the church that, Yes, the leaders, They are servant leaders.

They're not meant to be CEOs or presidents. They're not building their own brand or their own organization or their own empire. They are servants to the church. But they're also not democratically elected leaders.

They're not voted by the people, for the people, answerable to the people. What does he say? Who are they answerable to? Paul says they're servants of Christ. They've been sent to the church by Christ to serve Christ's church with the gospel.

And their job is to be faithful to what Christ has told them to say. I don't know if you know this phrase. Sometimes you hear this kind of in politics. Someone will say, I serve at the pleasure of the president.

[ 11 : 28 ] Or I serve at the pleasure of the chief executive. And what they mean is, My job is in the hands of the president. When the president doesn't want me to do my job, I'm out of here. Paul says, We serve at the pleasure of Christ.

So Christ is the one who sent us to then serve the church. Paul says, Church leaders serve at the pleasure of Christ. And they serve the church best by seeing themselves as servants of Christ to the church.

Now that's a very delicate balance to get right. So Paul's saying on one hand, we are servants to the church. On the other hand, we are servants of Christ to the church.

And what's happening here is that when earlier on, in chapter 3, Paul writes and says, Who are leaders? Who is Paul? Who is Apollos? Who is Kevin? We're nothing. We're just servants.

On one hand, that sounds like, Oh, great, servants. Okay, we just get to tell them what to do. And Paul says, No, no, no. We are God's servants. And we speak on his behalf and do what he tells us to do.

[ 12 : 33 ] So we don't change the message to make it more palatable. We don't run around doing what everybody necessarily is telling us to do. We've got a mandate from Christ. And we serve the church best when we answer what Christ has called us to do.

And that's really important because in chapter 3, Paul says, Who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are nothing but servants, right? And so some people in the church are saying, Okay, I've got my servants at work.

I pay them a little bit and I tell them what to do. I've got my servants at home. I pay them a bit and I tell them what to do. And then they hear Paul say, Oh, we are servants. And they say, Oh, okay. Now I've got my servants at church as well.

I'll just tell them what to do. And Paul says, No, no, no. We are servants of Christ that are called to serve the church. Now, here's the question. Why is Paul saying this?

Why is he making this distinction? If you are a little bit older, you might remember there's a pop song from the 1970s, okay?

[ 13 : 36 ] Bernard. And is Bernard here? And the song goes like this. It was by Carly Simon and the song is called You're So Vain. Do you know that song?

Okay. And the chorus goes like this. It says, You're vain. The word vain means self-opinionated, conceited, right? And the chorus goes like this. You're so vain, you probably think the song is about you, don't you?

Okay. Anyone know that song? Okay. Ron, I don't know you know that song. Okay. Well, a few years ago, a pastor called Alex Duke wrote an article called You're So Vain, You Probably Think This Church Is About You, right?

Don't you? And so that's what's going on in Corinth. There are these guys, and Paul says, Okay, we are servants, and they say, Yeah, that's right. That's right. We've got our servants at work.

We've got servants at home. Now we've got our servants at church. We're just going to tell you what to do. And Paul says, No, no, no, no. We are servants of Christ, and we serve the church best when we know who gives us our mandate.

[ 14 : 38 ] Who are we answerable to? We're answerable to Christ. If we are not answerable to Christ, we'll twist the message. We'll say what you want us to say. We'll try and become popular.

We'll try and win your favor. We might not be faithful to the gospel. Now, I must say, I don't see this often at Watermark.

I don't experience this often at Watermark. But this does happen from time to time, and I hear it happens a lot in various churches, and we're all susceptible to this. And what is the root of this?

This thinking of saying, of wanting to demand and just tell people what to do. What's the root cause of it? Well, Paul tells us here.

In fact, he tells us three times. Look at verse 6. He says, My hope is that none of you may be puffed up. The word there is proud or arrogant. Verse 18, he says, Some of you are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.

[ 15 : 36 ] Verse 19, But I will come to you, if the Lord wills, and I will find out, not to talk of these arrogant people, but their power. What's the problem in the church in Corinth here?

The problem is there's fraction, there's dividing, there's division, there's fighting, there's camps. But what's underneath the surface? What's leading to this conflict, this fighting? It's actually, there's pride.

There's a sense of arrogance. There's a sense of entitlement. There's a sense of self-sufficiency. And so some people are saying, Oh, it's all about us, right? I'm so vain. This church is probably all about me. And another group saying, No, it's about me.

And they're causing division, and fraction, and fighting. And so pride is not only manifesting itself in the division between the leaders and the church, it's also manifesting itself in the division between various church members.

How are they treating one another? And so they're getting political, and divisive, and there's factions, and there's arguments, and it's leading to conflict with one another. And pride and selfishness is tearing this church community apart.

[ 16 : 40 ] And friends, sin always does that. Whether it's the sin of pride and vanity, whether it's something else, it always has a vertical component between me and God, but also a horizontal component.

It damages relationships. And so the question is, what should Paul do? He has this church, there's pride, there's conflict, there's division. What should Paul do?

How should Paul solve the problem? What should all church leaders do? That's a really good question. Well, notice, what Paul doesn't do is he doesn't give them three tips on how to improve their life.

Paul doesn't say, come and, whoa, sorry, sorry, sorry. I apologize. Paul doesn't say, come listen to our sermon, I'm going to give you five ways to be successful in life. He doesn't give them three tips to self-help and self-improvement.

What does Paul do? He pushes them back to Christ and the gospel. He reminds them of who Jesus is and what the gospel is. He calls them back to Christ.

[ 17 : 42 ] And that makes sense because if the problem in a church community is pride and arrogance and self-sufficiency, what you don't need is three ways to improve your life.

That's like going to a doctor, he does an MRI, a blood test, he comes back and says, listen, there's a serious problem. You've got cancer. He has Panadol, right?

That's a bad doctor. For Paul to say, there's pride, there's division, there's conflict in the church. Yeah, let me just give you three tips to improve your life. That's not going to help them. What does he need to do?

He needs to call them back to Christ. And that's what Paul does. Friends, that's what all good church leaders do. What do church leaders do?

They call us back to Christ and the gospel. Elders, deacons, pastors, CG leaders call us back to Christ.

[ 18 : 37 ] Week in and week out, they remind us that Christ is the hope in this life, in life and death. They remind us our only hope is in Christ alone. They remind us that Christ is a sure and steady anchor as we sang earlier, Nate.

So Paul reminds them and calls them back to Christ. And look at how he does this. The first thing he does is he reminds them of Christ's grace. Look at verse 7 with me here in our passage.

Paul says this, he says, For who sees anything different in you? Or another way of saying that is, what makes you different from others? What have you that you did not receive?

If then you've received it, why do you boast as if you didn't receive it? Andrew Wilson says, this is Paul's entire theology in one sentence and the most beautiful question in the New Testament.

What did you receive, or what do you have that you did not receive by grace? Okay? So, he has this church, his conflict, his division, his fighting, and he's saying, everything you have, everything that we are, our salvation, the gospel, our standing, our wisdom, our education, everything that you are, everything that we have, you receive by grace.

[ 20 : 00 ] It's unearned, unmerited, undeserved, not because you're brilliant, not because you're amazing, it's God's undeserved grace and kindness to you.

So again, Andrew Wilson says this, grace, more than any other Christian teaching, pulls the rug from under self-reliance, our boasting, and our pride, because if everything we have has been given to us by God, how on earth can we boast as if somehow it's ours by right?

Okay? So Paul comes to him and he says, listen, there's pride and there's division going on in the church. How can I help them? And the one, the first thing he does is he says, everything you have, everything you are is by God's grace.

Now you may say, well that's not really true. I mean, I've worked really hard at my career, I worked hard at my university, I studied, I've put in long hours, I've achieved this.

Okay, yes, but let's just think about this. You could have been born to the untouchable castes in India, right? You could have been born to the Masai Mara in Tanzania under a tree somewhere.

[ 21 : 11 ] Everything you have, your education, your brains, your intellect, everything you have is grace alone. Been given to you by grace alone. And therefore, there is no room for boasting, for pride.

And that's why throughout this letter, Paul is constantly reminding us of Christ and the cross, Christ and the gospel, Christ and grace.

He says, yes, I know, that's foolishness to the world, stupidity to our culture, but the wisdom and the power of God is found in Christ and the gospel. Christ and Christ alone.

Christ's grace crucifies our pride and annihilates our self-sufficiency and unites us where there's division. And so, look at the last sentence in our passage.

Paul could have come and just smoked him, right? He could have said, you guys, stop it right now. Otherwise, I'm going to, but he doesn't. He says, let's just think about this.

[ 22 : 16 ] He says, everything you have, everything you are, it's Christ's grace alone. Let's look at the last sentence. He says, shall I come to you with a rod or shall I come to you with love and a spirit of gentleness?

He's an apostle. He started this church. They're rebelling against his authority. Of course, he could have come with a rod. But how's he first going to appeal to them? He's going to appeal to them with grace.

And so, Paul comes and he says, he says, friends, the kindness of God, remember the grace of God. Friends, let me just ask you a question. If you're stagnant in your walk with God, if your faith has become a bit dull, if you're bored with Jesus, if you're constantly in conflict with other Christians, is it possibly because you've forgotten the grace of God?

Forgotten the mercy of God? You've forgotten how Jesus went to the cross for a sinner like you, like me, like us? Is it that the gospel has become familiar and blasé and no longer real and vivid to us?

What Paul does here, the first thing is, he says, reminds them of God's grace. But that's not all he does. He does something else. And he also tackles their pride and their vanity.

[ 23 : 36 ] And Paul tackles their pride in quite an unusual way. He uses sarcasm and irony to show them just how ridiculous their pride is. I don't know if you've ever experienced this, okay?

If somebody says something really ridiculous, and then somebody imitates those people in an exaggerated voice to show them how ridiculous they sound, okay?

So maybe, let me give you an example. Maybe you're watching the NBA finals, right? And somebody, like, makes the shot and they miss the hoop, okay? And somebody that you're watching with says, that's such an easy shot.

I could have made that shot any day, okay? And you think, that's such an easy shot. I could have made that shot any day, right? What do you do? You're repeating what they're saying.

You're imitating them, but in an exaggerated voice to make them sound ridiculous, okay? Does that make sense? Or maybe, you've got two children at home and the one, your son says to the other son, hurry up, we're going to be late.

[ 24 : 40 ] And the other son says, hurry up, we're going to be late, okay? Do you get it? So sometimes you, Greta, why are you laughing? Okay?

Paul is going to do that. He's going to use sarcasm and irony to reflect what they're saying to show how ridiculous they are. Now, if you in youth, this is no excuse to be sarcastic with your brother and sister, okay?

No excuse. Look at what he says. Look at verse 8 with me. He says, already, you have all that you want. Already, you've become rich without us. Without us, you've become kings.

And he says, actually, that would be a good idea. We wish that you were kings because then we might share some of the rule with you. Okay? So they're saying, we don't need you leaders. Who are you leaders anyway?

We've got everything we need. We rule in life. We reign. We don't even need you. And Paul says, you don't even need us. You reign in life. You're rich. You've got everything you need. And then, remember in chapter 1, Paul says, when God called you, you weren't very rich.

[ 25 : 47 ] You weren't very powerful. You weren't very strong. You weren't very honorable, right? Well, now look at what he says. Verse 10. We are fools, but you are so wise. We are weak, but you are so strong.

We are held in disrepute. You are held in honor. So they are saying, we're so wise. We're so strong. We're so honorable. We don't need you leaders. And Paul's saying, you are right.

You guys, you think you're somebody, right? No, really. You really are somebody. We're nothing. You don't need us at all. And he's showing them, what's he doing? He's showing them how worldly and how secular their thinking has become.

Paul's reflecting their own words back to them. He's saying, can you guys see how ridiculous you sound? Can you see how proud you've become? How arrogant you've become?

Can you see how worldly and secular you've become? And he's reflecting his words back to them to show them how ridiculous they are. Now, why is he doing that?

[ 26 : 49 ] Why is Paul doing this? He wants to call them away, call them back from this worldly, secular thinking, this pride and this arrogance to humility and towards following Christ.

It's kind of like if you're swimming on the beach and there's a rip current, a rip tide and the lifeguards on the beach say, this is the safe swimming zone. Swim within these parameters.

And then they see somebody drifting into the dangerous waters. What do they do? They blow their whistle and say, hey, you come out of the rip current, come out of the dangerous waters, come swim here. Paul is saying to these guys, you're drifting, you're pride and you're arrogance, you're drifting into dangerous territory, come out of the waters, come back to biblical Christianity.

And what is biblical Christianity? Remember that everything you have is by grace alone. Come back to Christ and the gospel. And so look what he says in verse 14.

He says, I write these things to you, not to shame you, not to scold you, but to admonish you. Admonish you means to warn you, my beloved children.

[ 27 : 55 ] He says, I'm blowing my whistle, come back, come back to Christ. Your pride and your arrogance, you're drifting away from biblical Christianity. Come back to Christ and the gospel.

Verse 17, he says, that's why I sent Timothy, my beloved and faithful child, to remind you of how I follow Christ. What's Paul doing here?

Friends, what Paul is doing is what all Christian leaders do. He's not giving them three tips on how to be successful in life and how to reign in life and how to get ahead in their career and three ways to parent their kids.

He's calling them back to Christ, Christ and the gospel. And why is that? The reason is, this is Christianity in a nutshell. To love, trust, and obey Jesus.

To love Jesus, to trust Jesus, to obey Jesus. That's Christianity, discipleship in a sentence. That's what leaders do. We pour ourselves out. We serve, we shepherd, we teach, we instruct, we encourage, we correct, we call to repentance, calling away from the thinking of the world and the attitude of the world, calling us to Christ, to love, trust, and obey Jesus.

[ 29 : 09 ] And here you see Paul, he's doing these two things. He's saying, come away from the thinking of the world. Come away from the attitude of the world. Come away from secular hard attitudes.

Come away from pride and arrogance and follow Jesus. Hold on to Jesus. Trust, love, and obey Jesus. He's calling to these two things. And these two words, what are the biblical words for this?

Faith and repentance. Faith and repentance. Repentance and faith. In some ways, you could say, faith and repentance are the two words, the two motions, emotions, the two actions of the Christian life.

Faith and repentance, repentance and faith. The lifelong pattern of turning away from the kingdom of self, the turning to the kingdom of God. Turning away from the patterns of this world, turning towards the patterns of Christ.

Turning away from the thinking and the heart and the attitude and the idols of this world to hoping in Christ. Faith and repentance are not just the way into God's kingdom, they're the way of God's kingdom.

[ 30 : 19 ] Not just the way you become a Christian, they're the way you grow as a Christian. And so Paul here, he looks at this church and he says, there's a problem here.



There's pride and there's arrogance and there's self-sufficiency. What do you need? You need repentance and faith. You need to turn away from self and turn towards Christ.

What do church leaders do? They've got one message. Friends, if you've been here the last seven weeks, Paul's kind of just said the same thing for seven weeks in a row, right? Maybe you're getting a bit bored of Corinthians. Okay, that's okay.

Paul said one thing. Christ and Christ alone. Christ and the gospel. Christ and grace. Hold on to Jesus. So how does Paul do that?

What is his tools that he does? Well, the New Testament's got lots of things, lots of ways that we do this, but in this passage, Paul gives us two. And so let's just look at them very briefly.

[ 31 : 14 ] Paul does two things. The first thing he does is he uses scripture. He uses scripture. Look at verse six with me. It's a very tricky passage, a very tricky sentence, but look what he says.

He says, I've applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn from us not to go beyond what is written, that you may not be puffed up in favor of one against another.

Now, what on earth is he saying? It's an extremely complicated sentence in Greek, but scholars tell us what he means here is this. Don't go beyond what I've quoted in the scriptures.

Remember the scripture that I've brought to bear. Throughout the whole of 1 Corinthians, Paul keeps on quoting scripture, left, right, and center. He's quoting the Old Testament, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Psalms, Job.

He's been quoting scripture after scripture after scripture. And all the time, what is the scripture saying? He's saying, don't boast in yourself, boast in Christ. Don't hope in yourself, hope in Christ. The wisdom of this world is foolishness, but the wisdom of God is the one that makes sense.

[ 32 : 18 ] The weakness of man is, the strength of man is weak, but the strength of God is really what changes you. He's been quoting throughout the whole Old Testament, Paul has been bringing scripture after scripture to say, stop trusting in the things of the world, trust in Christ.

But he's saying, don't take it from me, listen to what God's word says. And so you think you're so smart, Corinthians? Well, look at what God's word says is real wisdom. You think that power is attained like this?

Let's look at what God's word says about power. You think that you're impressive? Look what God says is impressive. Paul keeps on saying, don't just take it from me, look at what the scriptures say, look at what God's word says.

Friends, this is what all good church leaders do. They say, don't listen to me. Who am I? I've got nothing wise to tell you. Who cares what I think about life and how life should work?

Let's listen to what God says. Friends, most of you are way, way smarter than I'll ever be. Who cares but what I think? And so when we come to church on Sunday, you don't want to hear what some idiot on stage has to think about life.

[ 33 : 29 ] We want to hear what does God have to say? Which is why week in and week out, we're opening up the scriptures and saying, what is God saying? What is Paul saying to the Corinthians? What is God saying to us?

Week in and week out, we want to listen, read, explain, understand, and apply what is God's word saying? Now, what does that mean for us?

Let me just ask you one question. In your CG's, are you throwing out human wisdom? Or are you listening to what God is saying? Is everyone in the CG just saying, this is what I think, this is what I think.

Or are you saying, let's see what the scriptures say. Let's see what God has to say. Friends, scripture is like a spotlight that shines through the fog and the mist and shines clarity on what really matters.

Scripture is like a clarion call through the echo chamber of our culture where we're all hearing this echo chamber of look after yourself, impress yourself, and be more wise and more smart.

[ 34 : 37 ] Scripture speaks truth and says, this is what wisdom is. This is what power is. This is who Christ is. And so we listen to scripture. Here's the second thing that Paul does.

Is he not only applies scripture, he uses personal example. Look at verse 15 and 17 with me. Paul says, although you have countless guides or teachers in Christ, you do not have many fathers.

For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you then, be imitators of me. This is why I sent Timothy, my beloved and faithful child and Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ or how I follow Christ as I teach them everywhere in every church.

So Paul says, you've got lots of teachers, lots of people who can tell you the right things, but no one to really show you how to live the Christian life. But follow me, imitate me, says Paul, as I show you what it means to follow Jesus.

Friends, the Christian life is so much more than just head knowledge. Yes, we need to be taught God's word from the scriptures. That's extremely important. But, the Christian life is more than just listening to sermons, more than just going to Bible studies, more than just reading Christian books.

[ 35 : 59 ] The Christian life is what does it mean to follow Jesus in the real nitty gritty areas of life? When life is hard, what does it mean to follow Jesus when relationships are difficult?

When you have money or you've got no money? When you're looking to retire? When work is difficult or colleagues are difficult? When you get that job or when you lose that job? When you have children or when you don't have children?

When life doesn't go your way, how do you follow Jesus then? And Paul says, you can't just learn that from books, you must have Christian community.

You must have those around you who are showing you how to follow the Christian life. Here's one simple application for us. If you're a parent here this morning, it doesn't matter how many church services you take your children to, it doesn't matter how many VBS programs you sign them up for, it doesn't matter how many Bibles you buy them when their children line up their bookshelf with Bibles, what's really going to shape their faith more than anything else is your faith.

And very seldom will our children grow in their faith and the love of the Lord Jesus more than our faith. We can buy the Bibles, we can sign them up for programs, but what our kids really need is to see that our faith is real to us.

[ 37 : 23 ] Paul says you've got countless teachers, countless guides, countless kids ministry teachers, okay, but what you really needed is someone to show you what the Christian life is all about.

So friends, let's conclude. What has God been saying to us today? Well, 1 Corinthians 4 shows us that God wants us to humbly receive the leaders that He's given us, to receive them as His servants and to allow them to help us to follow Jesus.

Church leaders, pastors, CG leaders, deacons, elders, they're not CEOs, they're not trying to build their own kingdom, they're not calling people to elevate themselves, no, they are servants.

Servants of Christ to serve the church and they serve us, the church, best when they're faithful to Christ and they are calling us to faith and repentance to follow Jesus.

Let's pray together. Father God, I must confess that sometimes, as we said earlier, your word is difficult.

[ 38 : 37 ] God, we see that we see church community is sometimes difficult. 2,000 years ago, the Christians in Corinth were struggling to get along.

There was conflict and division and the conflict and division was because of something in their hearts. Father, we must confess that even today, 21st century Hong Kong, that same root of pride, vanity, that root is in our hearts.

God, we have the same temptation ourselves. And God, when we find ourselves in conflict with others, it's because of that as well. Father, I pray, won't you help us to be a community that can so treasure and cherish the grace of God, that can so remember that everything we have is from you, that God, it'll melt our pride, it'll crucify our self-sufficiency.

It'll humble us, God, and call us back to you. God, I pray by your spirit, won't you be at work in our church and in our lives.

Be at work within us, God. Help us, God, to be a church that receives your scriptures, not the word of man, not the opinion of leaders, who cares what the elders and the pastors, thank God.

[ 40 : 03 ] We want to be a church that hears what you have to say. And so won't you help us? And then God, help us to be a community that can set the example, that can help one another in the real nitty-gritty areas of life to follow you.

God, we need your grace, we need your spirit, we need your help to do these things. Come and help us, I pray. In your great name, Amen.