

Practical Advice for Faithful Leadership

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: GTY181

Thank you all for joining us for a day to talk about the state of the church. And we'll just kind of wrap it up. Thanks to Steve for a great word from Philippians 4. So encouraging to have the confidence that we can do the things that God has called us to do and know that His strength will sustain and support us. Deeply appreciated that. In this final session, just going to talk to you a little bit; I've been asked to do that. I'm often asked about issues of leadership—spiritual leadership, leadership in life—and occasionally I think about it in fresh ways. And that's kind of what's been going on around here for the last few weeks, so I was asked if I would share some of these things with you that might be helpful to you. So this would just be kind of a little personal perspective and a personal talk on leadership.

Obviously we are all in the position of being leaders if we're in any kind of ministry. And leadership is basically defined as influence; and it should be defined as good influence. Leaders influence people for good. They influence them by what they teach by truth, and they influence them by example. And that's why Paul told Timothy to take heed to himself and his doctrine. The influence of your life should match the teaching, right? That's integrity. That's wholeness. That's being one person, not a hypocrite, not duplicitous.

So a life of leadership is important. But there are some elements of leadership that have struck me recently that I would just maybe hope would be a little bit helpful to you today. And what prompted all of this was watching the former president, Donald Trump, exit the White House; and it struck me that there were some profound, sort of HD lessons in leadership that were playing out at the end of his presidency. This has nothing to do with his politics or his economic viewpoints or his success in getting things done. But there were some stark realities as I watched the winding down of Trump's presidency and watched him exit, essentially by himself.

There was very little support coming his way. Even his vice president, who couldn't leave because he was an elected official, in the farewell speech gave his speech and never mentioned the President's name one time. It was an interesting separation, purposeful separation from that relationship which had gone on for four years. And you ask yourself the question, How does somebody with that kind of influence, that kind of power, that kind of potential, that kind of resources, that amount of people end up alone? And there are some profound leadership lessons to be gained from that, and beyond that—they're, in a sense, universal. And I thought I might just share them with you because I think they may be of help to you.

I asked our seminary students a couple of weeks ago if they could tell me the fastest pathway to leadership failure, the fastest pathway to leadership failure. And you may argue about whether this is first or second or third; but in my mind, this is the fast track to failing as a leader—apart from some epic moral issue. But in the world, that may not be an issue at all, as we well know in the secular world.

But the fastest pathway to leadership failure is one particular kind of behavior, and I'll give it to you and then see if I can explain it. It is taking credit for things you didn't do, taking credit for things you didn't do. This is an expression of pride that is destructive to what you need the most. And what you need the most is help, right? When you look at the President, and you realize that for four years there was a revolving door of people going through his cabinet, going through the White House—every time you turn around, and saw the news somebody was resigning, somebody was leaving, and somebody was coming. And people just went through at a more rapid rate than I had seen in any other presidential experience.

And what was the reason for that? First of all, I think it's related to the fact that there were thousands of people working behind the scenes to accomplish things that were being accomplished; but every time the President picked up a microphone, it was about him, and it was about what he had accomplished. And anybody who knows anything knows that probably the best ideas were tested and dry run through all kinds of people, and the actual work of meetings and writing and interacting and arguing and debating and doing all that you do to accomplish anything was undertaken by a huge force of people. But when the mic was in his hand, it was always about him. That is very destructive to building a team. First of all people find out right away that you don't tell the truth; and this is devastating to any hope to build a team. And just moving, shifting over into ministry, you can't do that in ministry because you're betraying a lack of integrity.

Again, let me just reiterate. This is the fastest way to lose your credibility: Take credit for things you didn't do. And it's always a temptation because leaders want to be successful, and they want to be admired; and so this is a very strong temptation. We watched the President do it. And by the way, whatever the term you might use, narcissists always do this. And it's incurable, it's incurable. It's something that is so deeply ingrained in their need to be the most significant person that rarely, if ever, can it be countered. So you see a narcissist literally run himself out the door alone before he changes this very strong tendency.

What happens when you take credit for things that other people do is, first of all, they know you're not telling the truth. Secondly, they become discouraged because they're doing work—it isn't that people need to be built up; they just need honesty, and they need appreciation. You would do yourself a great service if you focus your whole leadership style on giving all credit to other people. You don't need to take credit for anything—because you're in leadership, already have a profile that is visible, and that's sufficient for your pride to handle without you embellishing it by taking credit for things you didn't do, and consequently crushing the people under you who are working hard and feel like you're not telling the truth. And at first they are disappointed, then they're discouraged, then they're angry—then they're gone.

You see that even in a ministry where there's an extensive turnover, people coming in because they have some ideological or theological compatibility, and before very long they disappear into the darkness with the last batch of people who were there a short period of time. This creates tremendous internal resentment, and it isolates the leader in a world of fantasy. Honesty obviously is a virtue, and telling lies is a sin. But hedging so that you look like you get the credit when you really don't deserve the credit is a fast track to failure. I would go one step further and say even if you deserve the credit, don't take it. Deflect all of that so that people feel like you are there to elevate them, and lift them up, and show honor to them.

I've seen a lot of people like this through my years, people who desperately need to be significant,

whether they feel inferior or whether they feel superior, whichever, one is a sort of a front-side pride and the other is sort of a back-side pride. They want to be sure that everybody credits them with everything that's accomplished. Resist that ugly temptation, and you will build a team that will last a long, long time. It's basically Philippians, isn't it? "Look not on your own things but the things of others. Consider others better than yourself." Constantly deflect all accolades to the people around you for your own sake and their sake. Don't take credit for things that you didn't do.

This was so palpable in the four years of watching the President that it was unmistakable and explains why people couldn't survive in that environment—because asking that much of them at that level, working that hard, and then usurping the credit that they deserve was more than people could handle. If you want long-term relationships, then this is important. If you want long-term friendships, long-term team supporting the ministry that you do, they have to feel like you need them, like you can't survive without them—and that is the truth. So that's the first thing that was really, graphically obvious in the demise of the President over a four-year period: that revolving door of people, who were basically hailed when they came in and chased when they went out.

The second thing that I noticed in the President—and this is another thing, and I want to sort of pivot this point and talk about this in a spiritual sense—but the second fastest track to leadership failure is the inability to embrace the inevitable, the inability to embrace the inevitable. There's certain things that you face in leadership that are inevitable. One of them is you lose an election. But narcissistic people can't even take the inevitable. And what was left of the vestiges of the people surrounding the President was whatever energies and talents were left; they were all gathered up in one utterly hopeless effort to overturn a national election. So people were used to build up the man, and then they were used again to try to overturn the inevitable. And eventually those people were worn out very fast and started disappearing, and at the end there was nobody left.

There are features of life that you can't control. Egomaniacs can't deal with the inevitable; they want to push through the inevitable. They're not willing to accept the inevitable. They want to overturn the inevitable. They want to use and abuse everybody they can, to help them do what can't be done. They stand in the way of what is obviously taking place. This is deadly to leadership. You can't fight the inevitable.

Now let me, as I said, pivot into the kingdom. As a believer, obviously, and as a Christian, as one who represents Christ, you want to give credit to everybody else; and you want to be truly and genuinely humble. And secondly, you want to learn to embrace providence. So let's just change *the inevitable* to providence. You want to be able to embrace providence. What I mean by that is you need to be in the flow of what God is evidently doing: the working of divine providence.

There are people who have such big egos in ministry that they can't do that. They can't embrace, for example, their location. They can't embrace the people that the Lord has surrounded them with. They think if they had a different location, if they had different people, they could accomplish whatever their ambition desires. And so they frustrate all the people around them. They become pushy and self-serving, without being able to recognize what God is actually doing at the time. They start going against the grain of the will of God, and the faithful people are confused.

Let me talk a little more about providence without going into all kinds of definitions. Providence is God at work, right? It's just God at work. And I am convinced that the Bible teaches that God is at work in everything, and nothing happens outside His will. Everything that occurs is within the

framework of God's purpose to accomplish His own ends. A miracle is when God suspends natural law and injects something supernatural. Providence is when God takes all kinds of natural things, millions of them, disconnected events, and pulls them all together to create exactly what He wants without a violation of natural law or human action.

This is a greater miracle than a miracle. For God to stop the natural flow and inject a supernatural thing is a one-dimensional act on God's part. For God to cause His own will to be accomplished as a result of millions of independent contingencies is a miracle beyond comprehension. But that's exactly how He operates the entire universe.

Now I've heard people say, "Well, I don't want to believe that. I don't like Calvinism; I don't like divine sovereignty that takes away our will." Actually, the truth is the most comforting doctrine of all is divine sovereignty, right? I mean, I don't want to live in a world where God's not in charge; that's a frightening, terrifying world.

When I talk with people about the sovereignty of God, I don't necessarily talk about the doctrine of election, I talk about providence. It's one thing to come to the belief that God chooses who will be saved; that's absolutely true. It's far more vast to come to the conclusion that every single thing that happens in the universe fits perfectly into His will. That is a massive, massive concept. But it is the reality that gives you comfort at any point in life.

Again, I don't want to live in a world where God is not in charge, where's He's adjusting as He goes and trying to make sense out of nonsense. So whatever is going on in your ministry, understand that you are where you are—apart from your sin and foolishness—you are where you are because that's where God put you, and there's a work to be done. There's a flow if you will embrace the providence in which you exist.

What is the Lord doing around you? Who has He given you to help you? What kind of support has He given you? What kind of facility has He given you? What kind of financial resource has He given you? And see what the Lord is doing through those gifts and provisions that He graciously gives.

And I would go so far as to say, just on a personal note, that, I don't know, ninety-nine percent of my life is a result of God's providence, and the other one percent is something I planned. It is that extreme. I have basically one plan in mind, and that is to prepare for next Sunday and to serve the people that God gives me. Never been concerned about the people who aren't here; I am concerned about the stewardship of the people who are here, whether they're congregation or whether they're those who serve alongside as leaders in the church. So I feel like I've lived—I feel like I've ridden a wave of providence for 52 years here. And even before; and it's a daily reality. Every single day of my life, there is something that happens in my life that is not miraculous—but it's inexplicable apart from divine sovereignty. Things come together; things coalesce in ways that are stunning.

I don't need any freedom that I might imagine would have a better outcome than divine providence, because that's not possible. I don't want to plan my life; I just want to find out what God's doing and get in the flow of it. I'm more than happy to be controlled by God, and give up whatever freedom I have—because that would only have an awful outcome. I say this occasionally: even as simple as salvation; if I could lose my salvation, I would. If I was in charge of my life, it would be an absolute disaster.

So I think you have to come to the point in your life, as a leader, where you fully embrace where you are. Doesn't mean that you might not have a change coming in the future; the Lord may choose to do that in His providence. But discontent is not an option, right? "In whatever state you're in, to be"—what?—"content." We watched a president tried to unscrew the inscrutable, to reverse the inevitable because he couldn't cope with it.

You can't change providence; God has a flow of redemptive history. You should love providence. And the most instructive times of providence are the painful ones. Paul says, "I'm never really stronger than when I'm"—what?—"when I'm weak," 2 Corinthians 12. He found his usefulness was most effective when he had no trust in his own strength.

If I'm asked one question more than any other question, it's this one: "If you could go back in your life, what would you change?" And my answer to that is I'd sin less, and love more. But apart from that I wouldn't change anything; I'm not in charge of it. "Well, what about the hard times?" I wouldn't change those because God ordained those. "What about the good times?" I wouldn't change those. Change providence—are you kidding? Go back and write my own history for me, when I'm living the history that God has written for me? I love providence. And as I said, the most instructive times where God's hand is most powerfully and effectively unveiled is in the pain of trials that sometimes look like you can't find a way out.

It's easy to be discontent. But let me give you a principle to think about. If you doubt God's direction in the past, if you doubt God's providence in the past, you fear the future. Unless you can come to terms with the fact that God's providence in the past was exactly what was right and necessary, you have a reason to fear the future. If you don't like the past, if you don't think God was fair to you or gave you what you desired, if God failed in the past, then you're going to have problems trusting Him in the future. But if you trust God's hand in the past, then you have no fear for the future.

This is laid out over and over and over again in the psalms, where the psalmist is in some terrible circumstance and cries out to God about that circumstance, and without the circumstance ever changing ends up praising God. And he exhibits the dilemma of the pain and the suffering, but he ends up in praise because he trusts the God who has led him in the past will lead him in the future. That's why the psalms are so full of history of what God did in the past. It's just over and over reciting what God did in the past, and what He did in the past, how He delivered His people in the past.

There's a verse that comes to mind. At the end of Joshua, near the end of Joshua, 23:14, "Now behold, today I'm going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the Lord your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed." That's the way to end your life, and say, "Not one word that God ever spoke has failed in my life." That's Joshua at the end of his life, looking back and saying, "Nothing to change. God was faithful."

Understanding providence is the heart of worship. So let me talk about that just a little. Understanding providence is the heart of worship. Worship isn't about music, worship is—listen carefully—meditating on providence. Worship is meditating on providence. In other words, worship is rehearsing in your mind who God is and what He has done; that's worship. That's all through the Word of God. I'll give you one illustration.

All the psalms are an illustration, but the song of Moses in Exodus 15: “I will sing to the Lord, for He’s highly exalted”—this is worship. It meditates on the nature of God and His work. “I will sing to the Lord; He’s highly exalted. The horse and the rider He’s hurled into the sea.” So what is the Song of Moses about? It’s remembering the drowning of Pharaoh’s army. It’s meditating on providence and praising God for the past.

“The Lord is my strength and song, has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise Him; my father’s God, and I will extol Him. The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is His name. Pharaoh’s chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; and the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea. The deeps cover them”—and he goes into all this detail. This is what worship is: It is rehearsing divine providence, the nature of God and the work of God.

That song that’s sung by Moses and the sons of Israel comes down to a crescendo, verse 13: “In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed; in Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation.” “You’re leading Your people.”

This is what we celebrate. And over and over again in the psalms, that is laid out. Just think about Psalm 23—it came to mind: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” There’s an interesting sense of trust there. “The Lord is my shepherd”; what’s the next line? “I shall not want.” Why do you say that? What provision do you have for the future that is that secure? Well the answer to that is the provision of God’s care for you in the past.

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in”—what?—“green pastures; He leads me to quiet, still waters. He restores my soul.” That’s my current experience. Then he says, “Surely goodness and mercy shall”—what?—“follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” So his confidence in the future is based upon the present providence of God in his life. Past, present providence is what causes you to trust that you will have goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your life.

Sweetest communion with God is the recitation of all that God has done. And you can start with the beginning of the Old Testament, and you can go through the whole Old Testament, and you can go through the psalms and the prophets and the history of Israel and all that God has done; and you’re not through yet with providence. Then you can shift to the New Testament and go through all the revelations of God in the New Testament, and the providence of God bringing the Son of God into the world, the gospel being preached, churches being established, all the way to the triumph and book of Revelation, and what is yet to come. And the trust that you have in what is yet to come is predicated on the fact that God has ordained every step in history all the way.

So providence is that sweet communion that basically says, “I have seen the hand of God at work in the Scripture.” But it doesn’t stop there. After that you can look at the hand of God in church history. One of the reasons to study church history, one of the reasons to be fascinated by great preachers and great spiritual leaders through church history is to see the providence of God unfolding in their lives. Read the biographies. Read Steve’s biographies of these outstanding men, who really were gifts of divine providence; all kinds of things coming together to bring them to the point where God used them in such a mighty way. And there were a whole lot of lesser lights—the same thing.

Even as you go through church history, you're seeing God's unfolding redemptive providence. And then you come to your own life, and you look back and you see how God has led you every step of the way. And this is how you secure your hope for the future, by knowing that God has ordered everything in the past. So worship is that sweet communion in which I meditate on the nature of God and on the work of God unfolding in providence, and thank Him for both.

One of the reasons that around here we like to sing hymns is because hymns have verses. We don't necessarily want to sing the same little chorus over and over and over and over; we want some history in our hymns, right? We want some redemptive history in our hymns. We want some attributes of God and Christ and the Holy Spirit and the Word of God in our hymns, because this is meditating on divine attributes and divine history and divine providence. There's a Hebrew word in the Old Testament, *zakar*, and it's "remember," "remember."

The cancel culture would like to have you forget the past. Our culture is into that because they're afraid truth will crawl out of the grave and upset their sin. But for believers, we love the past because that is redemptive providence. So we remember, we remember. We sing the hymns that believers were singing 500 years ago, and we're all remembering the same redemptive history.

You haven't worshiped God by having some kind of emotion. You've worshiped God when you, with knowledge and with understanding, go through His attributes as revealed in Scripture and go through the acts of His providence in redemptive history and all the way up until your own life and what He's done for you. And look every day for the unfolding of providence. Keep your eyes open, connect the dots with what's happening in your life. See the amazing leading of the Spirit of God that unfolds before your very eyes.

So in leadership, just—you can think about these things far beyond what I've said, but you start out by making sure, as a leader, that you give all the credit and all the encouragement to the people who faithfully serve around you. Take none for yourself; certainly don't take credit for things somebody else did. And secondly, you learn to embrace the inevitable; or in the case of believers, to embrace providence: What's God doing? Who has He put around you? Who has He given you? And how can you maximize the instruments that you have, the tools, the resources that you have? Because they are the ones that God has given you. Some of them are going to be a benediction to you, and some of them are going to be a pain to you. But all of that is part of God's unfolding providence. And through the years—I've learned in these many years that God has taught me the most vivid lessons in the hardest times. You accept providence, but you have to fight for what is right at the same time—but you have to do it with wisdom.

Just two things more to mention to you. The third and very obvious thing—and I don't need to say much about it—but the third fast track to leadership failure is sin. And we don't need to say a lot about that. We see that before our very eyes all the time, as ministers are exposed for their transgressions. This is a hard world to survive in, if you're going to live a second life, because there's so many people searching for your failures and willing to exploit them. You have to start with a clear conscience, 2 Corinthians 1:12, and you have to show excellency in your character so that people will glorify God in the day of visitation, as Peter said. I've often thought that if it weren't for Jesus, I don't think I could sell Christianity to anybody in this culture, because there are so many disappointing agents that represent—or say they represent—Jesus.

So we know about the issue of sin: "Guard your heart." But I want to wrap up with just one other

thought that you can think about, and that is compromise, compromise. I may be coming at it a little bit different. The asset that is most valuable to you in leadership is trust—respect and trust. But what that means to people is you continue to be what they think you are, OK? You win them over to your convictions. You teach them, you live these convictions before them, and you win these people over because they trust you and they respect you.

I cannot, I cannot stress that too much—particularly trust; and respect is part of trust. And what that means is you—and it takes time to build that. As you teach, preach, live, converse with people, have casual conversation, they begin to develop an attitude toward you; they begin to know you. And if godliness and virtue and truth comes out, and you have these convictions, this conviction, this conviction, this conviction, you're not going to win over everybody. But the people who are drawn to those same convictions will identify with you, and they'll trust you, they'll trust you. And it takes a long time to build that trust. And once you have it, it's the most precious commodity that you have, and is one reason why it helps to stay in one place for a long time so that you build that trust.

When, for some reason inexplicable to those people who now trust you, you say something or do something that is inconsistent with what they thought about you, this is an epic failure. This is an epic failure because now they don't know if they can trust you. For example, you give a sermon against homosexuality at some point in your life, as one recent leader did, one pastor; and then a number of years later, you go to the National Cathedral and you're a guest speaker there, and the LGBT community is outraged because they find out you gave that sermon 15 years ago against homosexuality. And when confronted with that, you apologize. You apologize for giving the sermon on homosexuality because the LGBT community is offended. What you just did is cause all the people who trusted you to stop trusting you. This raises a dire question in their mind about courage, about conviction. And you're never going to be able to overcome that; you're not going to live long enough to start all over and gain trust at that same level. I've had this conversation with some very prominent pastors, where I've actually said, "You can't do that. You can't say that. You can't be with those people because you send totally confusing messages to people who thought you had certain convictions; and now you betray those convictions."

Protect your integrity. Protect your integrity. It takes courage because there's pressure that comes. But the greatest asset you have in ministry is your integrity—that you are who people think you are, and they lock onto that. And if that stays the same for your whole ministry life, you accumulate a valuable, priceless group of people who undergird you, support you, sustain you, love you, and believe in you.

You can't make some kind of big shift, you really can't without losing your trusting followers. If you go along and you identify as an evangelical, and then all of a sudden you decide you're going to identify as woke, you just lost the people who thought you believed the way you said you believed, and now aren't sure. And the bad part of that is you lost *them*; and then you went over to this side, and *they're* not satisfied with the fact that you've not gone farther with the issue. And it's very difficult to gain that crowd's full acceptance because you're not dotting every *i* and crossing every *t*. You can literally go from being trusted, to being distrusted at a vast level.

Protect your integrity. It might be hard to say you believe something, but if that's what you believe, you have to say it. What does Paul say in 2 Corinthians 4? "I believed, therefore I spoke." That's integrity. "I believed, therefore I spoke"—and that's what I believe. And if people can be sure over a long period of time that you don't deviate from that, that trust is absolutely priceless. It's absolutely

priceless. It gives you longevity, and longevity is related to influence. Then your life is not some kind of short burst that affected a few people, but it's a long-range influence. Protect your integrity.

Protect your convictions. If you teach and believe the things that are in the Word of God, and you've been bold enough to say them, keep saying them. I remember having a conversation with Larry King about the Lord and the gospel; and he knew what I believed because we talked about it a lot. And he said, "Well I'm going to be OK." I said, "Really? What do you mean you're OK?" He said, "I'm going to be OK. I'm going to make it to heaven." I said, "Well what makes you say that, Larry?" He said, "Well a famous evangelist told me I'll be OK because I'm Jewish."

You can preach the gospel till you're blue in the face, from a podium or a pulpit in a stadium; but you can't possibly say to an unconverted, agnostic Jew that because he's Jewish he's going to go to heaven, and have any integrity. That's where the test of your convictions is: When the pressure might be on, and you don't want to offend somebody, and you soft-soap the message, or you say something that isn't true. Never forgot that conversation. Of all the conversations I ever had with him, Larry King, that's the one I remember most: "I'm going to be OK because so-and-so told me I'm OK because I'm Jewish."

If you want a lasting impact on people, you cannot betray their expectations no matter what the pressure is. But at the same time, you don't want to ever be in a position, really, where you're tempted to change anything. So that's why you need to come to The Master's Seminary, so you get it all right from the beginning. I mean, you want to lay the foundation right—I'm being facetious. But you want to lay the foundation right, so you don't have to rewrite your theology midpoint in your life. Why do we teach theology in seminary? Because you need to know the full, big picture as well as the details. And you can't develop your own theology because you're already preaching. And if you don't have a theology and you're preaching, you can go down the wrong trail so readily. Theology gives the framework; it builds the fences that you stay within.

Trust is priceless. I can tell you, as somebody at this end of the line, what I see at this point in my life is people who believe in the ministry of this church, and they've been here long enough to trust in their love for the church, in their love for their leaders and their generous giving. They give like there was no tomorrow. They give with such generosity it is staggering—because the trust level is so high. When you're dealing with donors to a seminary or a university who are making commitments with their trusts and their wills and all of that, they all want to know the same thing: What are you going to do in the future? What's going to happen in the future? And if they see a pattern of trust—trustworthy theology, trustworthy living, Christ-honoring, God-honoring faithfulness—that secures the future. Don't think you can make a midcourse correction and wander off into some unbiblical zone and not sacrifice trust.

So those are just the things that were on my mind I shared with the seminary, and just passed them on to you. So just reminding you of what I've said: Humble yourself, and don't take credit for things that other people do; give them credit, build them up. You come every day of your life to serve the people around you. Their job is not to lift you up; your job is to lift *them* up. Read the providence of God as it unfolds; and it unfolds with where you are, and who you're with, and the resources that you have. And be grateful that you're where God wants you and you're in the flow of His providence. Keep your heart pure, and don't betray the very things that have caused people to trust you. Don't wander off into some direction theologically that will cause people to wonder if you really believe what you believe. When people get confused about a Christian leader, they lose their loyalty. And it

isn't that you need loyalty to yourself, but you need loyalty to the truth; and so you have to be faithful to it.

Well that's just musings from MacArthur, a little bit. Thank you all for tuning in to this livestream, non-Shepherds' Conference conference. Did those that are here get a copy of the Legacy Standard Bible? That was pretty amazing because they only arrived today. Yeah, you're going to enjoy that. Thanks to Dr. Lawson for encouraging us, and all the folks around here who helped you. And we're going to pray for you; you continue to pray for us.

And again, open your church. Be bold; open your church. The world needs desperately to hear from you; they don't need to hear from a lot of churches, but they do need to hear from you. So open your church, and call your people back, and be patient and loving with them as they adjust to being together if you haven't had that. They're not going to be able to shut us all down. And if we get a groundswell going, it's going to be impossible for them to take us all on. So join the group of bold saints and preachers who are saying, "Let's have church." That sound reasonable? So open your church, and faithfully preach the Word of God, OK? We'll have a word of prayer together; let's do that.

Father, thank You for this time that we've enjoyed in Your Word and in fellowship. And Lord, we fall so short of what You want us to be. So, so far away is the perfection of Christ. And yet we strive to be like Him: the goal, the prize, the upward call of Christ. Someday we will be like Him, when we see Him as He is. Until then, we desire to be like Him, but we fall so short.

Lord, strengthen us. Guard these men. Purify their minds and hearts. Give them insight into Your Word. May they proclaim it with joy. May they be content. May they embrace all the resources around them the very place they are, and find the flow of Your providence and get in it and rejoice in such a privilege.

Thank You that You are leading every one of us in the direction of Your purpose. And even the pain that we suffer has a perfecting work. So Lord, use us for Your glory, beyond what we can ever ask or think, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Amen. Thank you.

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