

There Is No Human Authority Over the Local Church

Casey Raymer | Team Vine, September 8, 2024, at Vine Church in Carbondale, Illinois

1

1 **Casey Raymer:**

2 [(0:00)]

3 ...will be talking about that as well. I think it was helpful to hear, from our text this
4 morning, that there were those — I don't know if you remember this — those who
5 believed but didn't confess it. Did you notice that in the text? Because they were afraid.
6 One of the things that is so important about being a Christian is that you confess it. J.T.
7 may have mentioned this in the second service, but that text in Romans is so helpful. That
8 we believe in our heart and confess with our mouth that Jesus is the lord. There's
9 something about a public confession that is so important in terms of salvation.

10 So, one of the best ways that you can confess that Jesus is lord is by being baptized.
11 Having your faith recognized before the other Christians in the local church. And so, if
12 you haven't registered to sign up for baptism, you can do that through the app or the
13 Sunday program. We would love to meet with you and talk with you about baptism, and
14 we'll be able to do those at our anniversary in a month. So, I think that's all I have to say
15 by way of announcements.

16 Um, typically we do, gosh, what do we do, SparkNotes theology? Uh, we recognize new
17 members, we set up our new group leaders, but we've got some things we need to talk
18 about tonight pertaining to our network of churches, so I'm just going to dive right in.
19 We'll do that and then we'll worship. Okay? So, many of you are already aware that
20 Isaiah Church in Madison, Wisconsin, formally withdrew from the network of churches
21 we belong to on Friday, August 30th. Citing concerns with the leadership theology,
22 church governance and past decisions. Um, how many of you have been around since we
23 planted Isaiah Church? Just out of curiosity. A lot of you. Okay, so you remember that
24 we planted Isaiah Church back in the summer of 2020.

25 That was the most challenging Church plant that I can remember - in the midst of
26 COVID. We did that in the summer of 2020, and since then Isaiah church has grown
27 from the plant team to now, they're averaging more than 100 regular attenders every
28 Sunday. And back in June or July — I'm not sure — in July, nine people were baptized.
29 And so Isaiah really is a healthy local church making disciples. And that's the whole
30 point for planting churches, right? It's healthy local churches, making disciples in a very
31 unchurched university city. So, we're excited about what God's done there and thankful
32 for what we know he will continue to do there. And so I know some of you are trying to
33 make sense of all that, but just know it's a healthy local church making disciples and, uh,
34 they made that decision and are moving forward with that.

35 Um, likewise, I need to tell you this evening that the overseers of North Pines Church in
36 Kalamazoo, Michigan, have also decided to disassociate from our group of churches. Uh,

37 they've come to realize, they are on a divergent path regarding biblical ecclesiology.
38 Which is the doctrine of the church or beliefs about the church. And some of the
39 applications that follow from those beliefs.

40 Um, how many of you were around for planting of North Pines Church? Fewer of you,
41 but a lot. North Pines was planted in the summer of 2016. Since then the church plant has
42 grown from the plant team to five or six hundred regular attenders at their Sunday
43 services. Last year, more than 50 people were baptized at North Pines Church.

44 It's also a healthy local church that's making disciples and I'm grateful to God for all the
45 work that he's done in that church as well.

46 So, some of you are hearing are like, "We're in a network of churches?" Let me explain
47 how...

48 [laughter]

49 ...so that you understand what's going on...

50 [muffled by crowd]

51 ... your first Team Meeting what's going on here...

52 Tacos were great [unintelligible].

53 So, some of you might be unfamiliar with our Network at church, let me give you a little
54 background. In 2006, Vine Church and a small handful of other churches, most of which
55 were planted by Vine, left the Vineyard Association of Churches over a disagreement
56 pertaining to church leadership. The debate was over whether or not the office of
57 overseer in the local church was reserved for men or was also open to women. And at that
58 time, and a few of you, much fewer of you were around for that, and you remember that
59 our biblical convictions led us to disassociate from the Vineyard and we became this new
60 group of churches at that time.

61 Since then, numbers of churches have been planted, and the churches have been unified
62 around love for one another and values for doing church. The network is governed by a
63 leadership team under bylaws, and we have a few conferences each year for training
64 purposes.

65 So, before I tell you about a relationship with the Network, let me describe a process
66 we've been in for a few years now. I don't know that I've explained this thoroughly yet to
67 all of you, but, in 2020, going all the way back to COVID — I know you've tried to
68 delete that from your memory — but, going all the way back to COVID, all of the pastors
69 began meeting daily and then weekly to discuss how to do church during COVID.

70 [05:00]

71 I remember being in the sunroom, trying to get an internet connection, doing a Zoom call
72 and trying to have discussions about “what do we do during this very difficult time?” As
73 time went on, uh, we just kept meeting weekly. So, all the pastors just kept meeting
74 weekly to discuss whatever we needed to, depending upon what was going on in the
75 church.

76 We gathered over and over again. And we started asking this question — and the guys
77 can tell you this. I said, “We have to know what God says about everything.” And so
78 what we would do is, on Thursdays, for a couple of hours every week, we would go in
79 there and we would say, “What does God say about ___?” and whatever it is that we
80 needed to figure out, we wanted to know what God said about it. And that became sort of
81 our process for leading the church.

82 It eventually turned into an opportunity to study the Bible on the subject of pastoral
83 ministry. We asked questions, like, “What are the responsibilities of a pastor?” and,
84 “How should we go about fulfilling them?” “What is the nature and extent of authority in
85 the church?” “What does it mean for us to lead and for people to follow us?”

86 We began to lead the church as a group of pastors through prayer. And with the Bible, we
87 also started to pray more on a daily basis for the church during that time. And we began
88 to nail down our convictions on church governance and on church leadership. And there's
89 a couple conclusions that we came to that I want to share with you, and I'll talk through
90 these from the Bible in just a moment.

91 Number one is church government. And we believe the authority over the local church Is
92 not located in the trans-local church organization, But in the local church “plurality of
93 overseers.” That word “plurality” is something I'll define for you. It's just the word plural,
94 more than one, the “plurality of overseers.” And then as regards church leadership, we
95 believe the authority of the local church plurality of overseers is not located in the *men*,
96 but in the *bible*. Okay? Does that distinction make sense? Not in the *men*, but in the
97 *bible*?

98 I could summarize it this way. Jesus has all authority in heaven and on Earth, right? And
99 that would include the church. He is the head of the church. He's the chief Shepherd of
100 the church, he is the king over the kingdom. The church is Jesus's church, and he
101 mediates his authority in the church through his word. And he entrusts his word to a
102 group of qualified men, a plurality of overseers, who lead the local church according to
103 his word. Okay? That makes sense? That's what we've come to believe.

104 Now, I need to update you on Mike Morgan. Maybe, you know, Mike, he served
105 faithfully for many years on our board of overseers. A while back last year he informed

106 the other board members that he believed it was time for him to end his tenure. This
107 decision was due to long-standing health concerns and an inability to carry out the
108 responsibilities of an overseer to the degree that he would like. I asked him, “Would you
109 stick around and help us with a budget in the fall?” And he agreed to do that. And so, in
110 December of 2023, after we finished the budget, The board of overseers approved his
111 resignation. And Mike has not been involved in any conversations or decisions regarding
112 Vine Church's relationship with The Network.

113 So, we currently have ten overseers. Okay? Um, I'll show you guys in a moment that our
114 board of overseers, which is necessary to be a 501c3 organization in the state of Illinois,
115 our board of overseers is something that we have to do. But we also have pastors, many
116 of them are on staff. And so, for us, we don't see a 501c3 organization board of overseers
117 as a Biblical category. Uh, we just see elders, overseer, shepherds, pastors, whatever you
118 want to call them. They're all together in the bible. And so, we believe — we have ten —
119 elder, overseer, shepherd, pastors. I'll call them elders or overseers throughout our time
120 tonight.

121 Um, that would be:

- 122 • Greg Darling
- 123 • Mike Staff
- 124 • Mike Stevens
- 125 • Noble Staley
- 126 • Josh Franklin
- 127 • Brent Woosley
- 128 • Peter Waring
- 129 • Michael Andre
- 130 • JT Weber
- 131 • and myself.

132 And so, our current overseers have been considering this question of our relationship to
133 The Network very carefully. And we have unanimously agreed that it's necessary for us
134 to withdraw.

135 And I'll take the rest of our time together to explain our biblical convictions on church
136 government and church leadership, and why we believe that it was necessary for us to
137 take that step. Ok? So, why don't you open your bibles to Acts chapter 20. We'll get into
138 the bible. Acts chapter 20.

139 [10:00]

140 This passage in Acts is where the Apostle Paul addressed the plurality of elders from the
141 church in Ephesus. As you guys know, Jesus did ministry before the Apostle Paul, with a

142 dozen of his disciples. Uh, but he only used the word “church” on a couple of occasions.
143 He said it once when he said he was going to “build his church.” Some of you recall the
144 confession of Peter, that he was going to build his church on his confession, that Jesus
145 was the Christ, the son of the living God. And then on another occasion, uh, he said that
146 the church would have a responsibility to help restore brothers, who are in sin, and in
147 conflict. And so, in order to learn more about how churches are supposed to work, we
148 have to look at the rest of the New Testament.

149 At Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 when the Holy Spirit descends upon the believers, Peter
150 gets up and he does the very thing that, uh, we just spoke of. That is, he confesses that
151 Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God. And you guys remember the story: 3,000
152 people are saved. And the church is born, right? And pretty soon, I mean like very soon,
153 they have to appoint people in the church to take care of the widows. And the rationale
154 for that, from the Apostles, is that we have to do the ministry of prayer and the word.
155 They have to focus on praying for the people and teaching the people.

156 And so, you're starting to see the beginning of a structure in the church that develops over
157 time as people are sent out by Jesus, to bear witness to him, uh, to the ends of the Earth.
158 And so, if you've read through Acts, what you see is these evangelists go into different
159 cities, they preach the gospel, people believe, and, all of a sudden, you have a community
160 of Christians. And then they have to organize. They have to come up with a structure.
161 They have to figure out how they're going to relate to one another. And so, as Acts
162 chronicles the development of the church, we start to see some of those things take shape.
163 And then if you read the letters in the New Testament, it provides instruction from the
164 Apostles on how to do church. And so we'll look at Acts chapter 20 and Hebrews chapter
165 13 and try to make sense of church government and church leadership together.

166 So Acts chapter 20, beginning in verse 17, it says:

167 Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.
168 And when they came to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived among
169 you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all
170 humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews;
171 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you
172 in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance
173 toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

174 And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what
175 will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that
176 imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as
177 precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from
178 the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that

179 none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face
180 again. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did
181 not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

182 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made
183 you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I
184 know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the
185 flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw
186 away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did
187 not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God
188 and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance
189 among all those who are sanctified. I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You
190 yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were
191 with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help
192 the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more
193 blessed to give than to receive.'"

194 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

195 [15:00]

196 And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him,
197 being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see
198 his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

199 Okay, let's stop there and pray for a moment.

200 Father, we thank you for loving us the way that you do.

201 As always, we thank you for your son that you so freely gave. We recall the words from
202 the prophet, Isaiah that were read to us this morning. How it was your will to crush him,
203 so that you could bring us to salvation. Jesus, we thank you for going to the cross — for
204 willingly enduring the wrath of God on our behalf. We thank you for our salvation. We
205 thank you that you are calling a people, both Jews and Gentiles, to yourself. We thank
206 you for the church.

207 Lord, we're grateful that you make us members of the same body, members of the same
208 household, citizens of the same kingdom. We thank you that we're inextricably linked to
209 you and to one another in the church. We love you; we trust you. We thank you that
210 you've spoken. We thank you for your word to us in the bible. We thank you for the
211 instructions, not just in the gospel, but for the church. We ask tonight, Holy Spirit, would
212 you be with us? Would you enable our minds to comprehend, our hearts to receive,
213 everything written in the bible? Would you allow us to make helpful observations and

214 applications of the text for our current situation. We just pray that you would bless us and
215 be with us in all of these things. And we pray it in Jesus' name, Amen.

216 Well, let's begin with verse 17. And we'll spend a fair amount of time here even though
217 it's a short verse. I don't want to spend 10 or 15 minutes on this, and you think that's the
218 way it's going for the rest of the text.

219 Uh, he says from Miletus, he's sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to
220 come to him. Uh, "he" there is Paul. And Paul is an Apostle, and we need to understand
221 what exactly an Apostle is to make sense of his relationship to the church in Ephesus, to
222 the elders of the church in Ephesus.

223 Uh, the word Apostle comes from the Greek *apóstolos*, it actually just means "one who is
224 sent." it's used of the twelve Apostles that were the original followers of Jesus. It's used
225 of Matthias who replaced Judas, but it's also used for a few other people in the New
226 Testament, and, uh, one of them is Barnabas. And what you begin to see is there's a little
227 bit of a distinction between two groups of people that are referred to as Apostles. As you
228 might say, there are "lowercase-A-Apostles," and "capital-A-Apostles."

229 The lowercase-A-Apostles seem to be considered ones who were sent, or missionaries,
230 for Jesus. Or ambassadors for Christ. And I think this would include people like Barnabas
231 that haven't been considered capital-A-Apostles. in Acts chapter 13 verses 2 and 3. It says
232 that the church in Antioch, they were worshiping the Lord and fasting. And the Holy
233 spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called
234 them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and they *sent them*
235 off.

236 But let me.... and then, in, in chapter 14, the next chapter of Acts and verse 14, it says
237 this: But when the Apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their garments and
238 rushed out into the crowd. Because of what was going on there, but you see that they *sent*
239 *them out*, and then the sent ones who went out from the church in Antioch are referred to
240 in the following chapter. These ones who are sent, these missionaries, these ambassadors.

241 But then there's capital-A-Apostles, and it's a little bit different. They had authority. And
242 they had authority, because they were eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. And they
243 were commissioned by the resurrected Jesus. They have different credentials. Uh, they
244 govern churches, and they wrote scripture.

245 Um, the small, the small-A-Apostles were sent out by churches while the big-A-Apostles
246 were sent out by Jesus.

247 And Paul records his experience as an Apostle, a capital-A-Apostle, like this. In First
248 Corinthians chapter 15 verses 7 through 9. It says, then he, referring to Jesus, appeared to
249 James. This is the resurrection.

250 [20:00]

251 Then to all the Apostles. And he says this: last of all, as to one untimely born, he
252 appeared also to me, for I'm the least of the Apostles, unworthy to be called an Apostle
253 because I persecuted the Church of God. And if you've read the book of Acts, you know
254 what that experience was like for Paul, when he appeared to him. Remember on the
255 Damascus Road? It was not a pleasant experience for Paul. Jesus appeared to him, he
256 spoke to him, and he commissioned him to be his chosen instrument to the Gentiles. So,
257 he saw the resurrected Lord, He was commissioned by the resurrected Lord. His situation
258 was different. This is after the ascension of Jesus. And so, he says, "I am one that's
259 untimely born." Right?

260 "Last of all" is also an important point to make there. "Last of all." That is last of all the
261 capital-A-Apostles, last of all of the Apostles who have authority to govern churches and
262 to write scripture — "last of all." I'm one untimely born because the Lord appeared to
263 me, and he commissioned me.

264 I think what's so important here, and you may have noticed at the end of our text in Acts
265 chapter 20, that when Paul leaves the Ephesian elders, do you realize what he did? Did
266 you notice that? It says, "I commend you to God. And the word of his grace." The
267 interesting thing is the Apostle Paul did not commend the Ephesian elders to another
268 Apostle. It's really important to note. I commend you to God. And to the word of his
269 grace. And so, they're going to go back to Ephesus and they're to lead the church there
270 with the word of God together, and more on that, in just a moment.

271 As the Apostles died, what we see is that the Apostolic teaching contained in the New
272 Testament began to govern the church. The authority was in the scriptures, it was in the
273 New Testament. Let me show you that in Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 2, verses 19
274 through 21 says this: So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow
275 citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

276 He's talking about the Gentiles, how through Jesus, they've been brought into the family.
277 They are members of the household of God and uh, it says that it was: ...Built on the
278 foundation of the apostles and prophets — that phrase there is important, it's going to
279 show up 3 times in three chapters — "built on the foundation of the Apostles and
280 prophets," — he says: Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole
281 structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

282 I love this picture of the church. The church is a dwelling place for the spirit, the church
283 is the holy temple to the Lord. And the foundation of the church is Christ Jesus. The
284 Cornerstone, the first stone that is laid. And then the foundation is the Apostles and the
285 prophets. And so, you should be thinking to yourself, “Who are the apostles and the
286 prophets, what is the nature of this Foundation?”

287 Well, if you go to Ephesians chapter 3 and verses 4 through 6, it says this:

288 When you read this, you can perceive my — again, the Apostle Paul — you can perceive
289 my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was *not made known* to the sons of men in
290 other generations as it has *now* been revealed to his holy Apostles and prophets by the
291 Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and
292 partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

293 So, the Apostles and prophets that are the foundation of the church, the holy Temple that
294 is built up, Christ Jesus Being the cornerstone. Those Apostles and prophets are the ones
295 who, at that time, now had the revelation that the mystery of Christ was for the Gentiles.

296 Okay? This had not been revealed to other generations and when you get this “mystery of
297 Christ” language throughout the New Testament, you're getting the revelation of what
298 God is doing through his son. This new covenant, the mystery of Christ that has now
299 been revealed to the Apostles and the prophets. And that revelation that came to them
300 through the Spirit, is the foundation upon which the church is built.

301 Are you tracking? I would say, the Apostolic teaching, the prophetic word, the scriptures,
302 the New Testament, with Jesus Christ being the heart and soul, the cornerstone, the
303 primary message. The gospel of Jesus, being the central theme of the New Testament, of
304 the new covenant. That is the foundation upon which the church becomes the holy
305 temple, a dwelling place for the Spirit. Now Ephesians 4:11 and 12, we get the same
306 phrase, one more time. And he — that’s Jesus, after his ascension into heaven —

307 [25:00]

308 — and he gave the Apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers, to
309 equip the saints for the work of ministry, for, again, building up, this time it’s referred to
310 as the body of Christ.

311 So let me put it all together for you.

312 The Apostles and the prophets received a revelation from the Spirit concerning Christ,
313 okay? And that revelation contained for us, in the Apostolic teaching of the New
314 Testament, is the foundation upon which the church is built up. As the evangelists take
315 that gospel and preach it, people are converted and become Christians. And then the

316 shepherds, the elder, overseer, shepherds, the pastors, then take those who have become
317 Christians, and they teach them to grow up into maturity in Christ.

318 Are you... Do you see how that works? Now... that “shepherds and teachers” is literally
319 “shepherd/teachers.” Because it's going to suggest that it's something in the nature of the
320 ministry of the shepherd. Primarily to teach. There are shepherds who teach. So that
321 everybody can observe all that Jesus has commanded them. That's the idea, the Apostolic
322 teaching being contained in the New Testament, and the Christians and the churches
323 being governed by that authority.

324 That's why Paul says to the Ephesian elders, I commend you to God and to the word of
325 his grace.

326 You'll note that there was only one Apostle chosen to replace Judas, and that was
327 Matthias. There weren't any others. You'll note that throughout the New Testament, there
328 are no qualifications or job descriptions for the office of Apostle, only elders, overseers,
329 and deacons.

330 There's no appointment of any Apostles in the churches, only elders or overseers and
331 deacons. Okay? Therefore, Paul's role in the churches in the New Testament, is not
332 *prescriptive for now*, but *descriptive of then*. Okay. *Prescriptive for now*, meaning “what
333 should happen now.” Not *prescriptive for now*, not what should happen now; but
334 *descriptive of then*, what did happen then. Okay?

335 We don't understand there to be Apostles, Capital-A-Apostles or Apostolic teams that
336 oversee churches. But the local church plurality of elders, just like the ones in Ephesus
337 who were commended to God in the word of his grace. Does that make sense?

338 So, the Ephesian elders have the responsibility, as Paul went on to tell them, to shepherd
339 the flock of God under the authority of God, contained in the word of his grace.

340 We're not even done with verse 17 yet. We're flying through it, aren't we? Just keep
341 going. I got a few more things to say here about the elders of the church in Ephesus.

342 Now, one of the things that's... probably escapes your notice on a casual read, is that it's
343 plural. Elders. Right? It's not one Elder. Uh, its *elders*. And elders, overseers, shepherds
344 is always plural in the New Testament, so bear with me and let me prove this to you. I
345 suspect you trust me, but I'm going to prove it to you. Titus Chapter 1:5: This is why I
346 left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint *elders* in
347 every town...

348 Acts chapter 14 verses 21-23: When they had preached the gospel to that city and had
349 made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,

350 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and
351 saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they
352 had appointed *elders* for them in *every* church, with prayer and fasting they committed
353 them to the Lord to God in whom they had believed.

354 Acts chapter 15 verse 4: When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the
355 church and the Apostles and the *elders*, and they declared all that God had done with
356 them.

357 Philippians chapter 1 verse 1: To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with
358 the *overseers* and *deacons*...

359 1 Peter chapter 5 verse 1: So I exhort the *elders* among you, as a fellow elder and a
360 witness of the sufferings of Christ...

361 James chapter 5 verse 14: Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the *elders* of the
362 church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord...

363 Always plural. And so that's why I use that phrase the "plurality of elders or overseers" as
364 the ones who are to lead the church.

365 They must be called - in our text in Acts chapter 20, you know, Paul says, "over which
366 the Holy Spirit has made you." They are somehow selected by God and that identification
367 has to be made known to the others.

368 [30:00]

369 The Holy Spirit has made you overseers. They must be called and qualified. Those
370 qualifications contained in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and Titus Chapter 1.

371

372 So, the members of the church don't have a leader. But they have leaders, plural. And the
373 plurality of local church overseers have the responsibility to lead the whole church
374 together. And this is what we happened to be doing over the past several years and then
375 discovered it's what we should have been doing, right? And there's a sense in which
376 we've always been doing it, but we're learning more about how to do it.

377 It's not about me being a lead pastor and having some sort of unique power or authority in
378 the church. It's not about the board having some sort of unique power and authority in the
379 church. It's all of the elders, overseers, shepherds, pastors together according to the word
380 of God bearing the responsibility of leading the whole church. That the authority is not
381 external, but internal. Not one, but many.

382 Some people have asked me, “What's my job as a lead pastor and is it any different than
383 the others?” And I would say that the lead pastor is equal to the other overseers in his
384 authority. I believe that to be true.

385 Sometimes the guys will say to me, “You need to...” — I say, “Ah, ah. *We* need to.”

386 Don't you put that on me. Uh, as you can see, my shoulders aren't very broad.

387 [laughter]

388 I'm working on it. I'm trying to turn my charitable donation to Planet Fitness into
389 something...

390 [laughter].

391 Some people have said, the lead pastor could be considered first among equals. Maybe
392 that's true. Uh, First Timothy chapter 5 verse 17 says this... oh, I don't have it. Ope, yeah
393 I do: Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those
394 who *labor* in preaching and teaching — it is labor — and those who rule well in the labor
395 of preaching and teaching, he says, be worthy of double honor. I think he's talking in the
396 context about compensation. He's talking about not muzzling an ox when it treads out the
397 grain.

398 This idea of receiving honor is something that should be bestowed upon those who rule
399 well, who labor in preaching and teaching, so long as they're preaching and teaching is
400 according to sound doctrine, right?

401 But there's something about that, and because the majority of the preaching and teaching,
402 I do the majority of it, maybe there's some honor there.

403 Um, but I think what it amounts to is not power, but influence. And when you do, the
404 majority of the preaching and teaching, you end up to some degree, even unintentionally
405 perhaps, setting the culture and casting the vision for the church. [Unintelligible] ...call
406 me a pastor for preaching and vision. How's that? Whatever. Lead pastor, it's the same
407 idea.

408 And so there is a role that different overseers can play based on their gifts and abilities.
409 But all of us are primarily devoted to prayer in the ministry of the word. It's important to
410 note that I am mutually accountable to the other overseers, and we are mutually
411 accountable to the word of God in his grace.

412 I don't get my way. It's not intended to be like that. Okay. None of us are supposed to get
413 our way. And the thing I love about the plurality of overseers at Vine Church, is it is a
414 mix of different ages and gifts. And it is a wonderful thing to not be led by any

415 individual, but a group of called and qualified men who come together with their bibles
416 open, and their hands folded in prayer to figure out how to move forward to the church.
417 It's slow. [Laughs] And that's great. That's how it should be. And it preserves us as a
418 church and makes sure that we stay on track, because we're accountable to one another
419 and submitted together to the bible.

420 And so, here's Paul, the Apostle, speaking to the elders of the church in Ephesus, the
421 church he planted. He was there with him for 3 years. I suspect that he installed these
422 elders at the beginning of the church plant. He's been away doing some things, and now
423 he's going to visit them, have this, have this wonderful conversation with them, and then
424 he's going to go on and eventually he'll write the letter of Ephesians 5 or 10 years later
425 and give them further instructions as the leaders of the church there. Okay. We're gonna
426 go a lot faster through the rest.

427 In verse 18 and 19: They came to him and said to him that, "You yourselves know," —
428 He said of them —

429 [35:00]

430 "You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set
431 foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that
432 happened to me through the plots of the Jews.

433 I love that Paul is always putting his life on display. He served the Lord, he says, with all
434 humility. I'm not sure it's humble to say that, but he said that, "I served the Lord with all
435 humility." He clearly loved the church. He did it with tears. He suffered on behalf of the
436 church; he did it with trials. If you look at a man like Paul and the way that he bled for
437 the church and the way that he worked hard, and he paid for his own way so that the
438 church wouldn't be burdened, it's hard not to want to follow a man like Paul. And we see
439 here, the leaders in the church are to be humble Men, who love the church and suffer on
440 behalf of the people. Not lording it over them like the Gentiles. Servant leaders like Jesus
441 did with the Apostles. Good shepherds, who lay down their life for the sheep.

442 Paul is following the leadership instructions that Jesus gave the other Apostles. And the
443 case is that if a leader practices what he preaches and suffers for the sake of the church,
444 the people should be inclined to imitate their faith. The leaders — see, I'm still working
445 on it — the leaders. They should be inclined to imitate their faith. That's Hebrews 13:7.

446 Okay, one thing to point out here, and we're going to roll through bigger sections. Um, I
447 think what Paul's doing here in showing us that he's worthy to be listened to because of
448 his life; he practices what he preaches. Uh, it does, it does begin to give an example for
449 leaders in the church, and I mentioned earlier that overseers in the church are being
450 qualified, and all of the care, and all of the qualifications for overseers in the church are

451 character qualifications, with the exception of one. You can read through them on your
452 own time.

453 First Timothy 3 and Titus 1, you'll see the character that an overseer is supposed to have,
454 but it says in both first Timothy 3 and Titus 1 that there's one skill requirement. And that
455 skill requirement is that they're able to teach, because they're shepherd teachers. Because
456 that's the essence of what they do. That is the pastoral ministry: to be devoted to prayer
457 and to the ministry of the word. And you see that on display in verses 20 through 26.

458 It says: I did not shrink from *declaring* to you, anything that was profitable, and *teaching*
459 you in public and from house to house, *testifying* both the Jews and Greeks of repentance
460 towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Talks about how he's going away and
461 he's going to deal with imprisonment and afflictions, but he doesn't count his life as
462 precious to himself. I love this verse. I think, wow, what a verse! If only I may finish my
463 course and the *ministry* that I received from the Lord Jesus. What ministry is that? To
464 *testify* to the gospel of the grace of God.

465 And he says, you're not gonna see me again. Those of you among whom I've been
466 *proclaiming* the kingdom, you'll never see my face. Therefore, I testify. I'm innocent of
467 the blood of you all. How do you like that? It's like, look, if you believe, it's not because
468 of me. I'm innocent of the blood of you all for I did not shrink from declaring to you the
469 whole counsel of God. I was there for three years in Ephesus, and I did not shrink in fear
470 of the Jews, the plots of the Jews, or anybody else. I did not shrink from declaring to you
471 the whole counsel of God. Everything that God had to say to you, I told you. I told you
472 that.

473 What we see is that the ministry of an Apostle is to testify to the gospel of grace and
474 declare the whole Council. I already read for you Acts chapter 6, verse 4, where Peter
475 says, we must devote ourselves to prayer in the ministry of the word. If you recall, the
476 great commission where Jesus tells him — he appears to them, he commissions them —
477 he says, “Baptize them in the name of father, son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to
478 observe all that I have commanded you.”

479 Not only was teaching the ministry of the Apostles, it was the ministry of Jesus. His
480 primary ministry was the ministry of the word. He was the word incarnate who was
481 always proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom. And we see that it's the ministry of
482 the overseers, who must be able to teach. 1st Timothy 3: You must hold firm to the
483 trustworthy words taught. Titus 1:9: They must be able to give instruction and sound
484 doctrine, and also, to rebuke those who contradict it. Titus 1:9 — by the way, when
485 there's qualifications for deacons, these are not included — Titus chapter 2 verse 1 says
486 that they must teach what is in accordance with sound doctrine.

487 I've already explained to you that they're called shepherd-teachers. In Ephesians, chapter
488 4, verse 11, you'll recall Jesus telling Peter, "Feed my sheep, tend my Lambs." There's
489 additional text, Second Timothy chapter 2: You then, my child —speaking to Timothy
490 who's a pastor, an overseer — be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus and
491 what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, and trust the faithful
492 men who will be able to teach others also. These qualified — these called and qualified
493 men — who will be able to teach others also.

494 [40:00]

495 First Timothy chapter 4. These are the instructions for church. You may wonder, "Why
496 do we do church the way we do?" Well, it's right here: Until I come, devote yourself to
497 the public reading of scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you
498 have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on
499 you. Practice these things — that's teaching — *to exhortation*, that's teaching. Practice
500 these things. Immerse yourself in them so that all may see your progress. Keep a close
501 watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persistent in this, for by so doing you will save
502 both yourself and your hearers.

503 And then my favorite. Second Timothy chapter 4: I charge you in the presence of God
504 and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his
505 kingdom — If you're trying to get somebody to listen to you, I mean, that's a good way to
506 start.

507 I should do that with the kids when I have a commandant to give them — I charge you in
508 the presence of God and of Christ Jesus... Here's the charge: Preach the word. That's the
509 charge. Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and
510 exhort with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not
511 endure sound teaching. But having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves
512 teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and
513 wander off into myths.

514 Paul commended the elders in Ephesus to God and to the word of his grace. God has
515 always ruled his people through this word. Right? He's always ruled his people through
516 his word. From the law, to the prophets, to Jesus, to the Apostolic teaching in the New
517 Testament for the church.

518 Pastoral ministry, guys, is the ministry of the word. Bible preaching. Bible teaching.
519 Bible counseling. Bible training. Bible discussions. Bible conversations. The
520 responsibility of an overseer is to bring the whole bible to bear in and through the person
521 and work of Jesus on to the lives of the people in the church, regardless of whatever
522 situation they're in. That is the Pastoral Ministry.

523 That's what we discovered on Thursday mornings, week after week. The bible should be
524 front and center, primary and foundational, to everything we do. Guys, what we do, we
525 want to come from the Bible. We don't come up with something to do and then make sure
526 it's okay with the bible. We want everything that we do to come *from* the Bible. That's
527 why we make decisions based on "What did God say?" What did God say?

528 The group leaders labored for one year, going through the whole bible together. We met
529 on Tuesdays at 6:30. Not 6:00, 6:30. And we did that week after week, for an entire year,
530 they read through the whole bible. They came in, we drank coffee. I taught them, some
531 other pastors taught them. We had great discussions, sometimes we prayed for each other.
532 Sometimes we had a casserole. It was a great time. We just made our way through the
533 bible because we want all of our group leaders to know the bible to be able to build up
534 and to encourage and to speak the truth in love to the people.

535 It's why we're doing a men's bible study. It's why we do expository preaching every
536 Sunday, because we believe that it's the word of God. And what we want to do is to give
537 you the word of God. We want to lay it open before you.

538 Didn't JT do a good job of that this morning?

539 [Crowd assents]

540 Wasn't it good? He put in work. And I went up after to him and said, "Thank you for the
541 work that you did for me, for my soul. You fed me [inaudible] good. More application
542 next time, but really good.

543 [Laughter]

544 He just loves the Bible. You think, "That's it." You don't need to hear about me. You
545 don't need, you don't need to hear my thoughts or commentaries or musings. We want to
546 explain the text. We want you to know what God says to you. The whole counsel,
547 [inaudible] books of the Bible. The whole counsel of God.

548 I love these definitions of expository preaching. This is from John Stott. Uh, the first
549 book I ever read on preaching called *Between Two Worlds*. It's an old book, but it says
550 this: "To expound scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view.
551 The Expositor opens what appears to be closed, makes plain what is obscure, unravels
552 what is not, and unfolds what is tightly packed."

553 And Mark Devers says this: "Expositional preaching is preaching in which the main point
554 of the biblical text being considered becomes the main point of the sermon being
555 preached."

556 [45:00]

557 Sometimes people say, “What’ll you preach on on Sunday?” I’ll say, “I don't know, I
558 haven't looked at it yet. After I'm in the text for two or three hours, I can tell you that.”
559 But until I get in there for two or three hours, I don't know, because I have to find it in the
560 text. What's the point? What's the point? What does this tell me about God? What does
561 this tell me about sin? What does this tell me about me? What does this tell me ultimately
562 about Jesus, knowing what he’s done on my behalf. The outline, the main point, the
563 application all come from the text.

564 With topical preaching, it's easy to inadvertently impose your ideas, your comments, and
565 your stories into the text rather than pulling everything from the text. Obviously,
566 considering everything in light of the person and work of Jesus, and I teach our guys:
567 You preach first for the glory of God. Yes, uh, to explain the text and apply it to the
568 people. But first and foremost, you get up there and you show them how awesome God
569 is. That's the goal of preaching. It's for him, and then for us. Because we want to come
570 and hear from God, and behold the glory of God, and that our preaching be pleasing to
571 God. We want to let God speak because the spirit of God does the works of God through
572 the word of God and the word of God does not return void.

573 Do you guys know Second Timothy 3:16? All scripture is breathed out by God. I'm so
574 thankful for that. Aren't you thankful that we have words from God? Everybody's got
575 something to say. You know? Of the making of books, there is no end. Of the making of
576 YouTube videos, there is no end. Everybody's got something to say. and I'm so thankful
577 that God spoke, and we have it. Now, listen to this, verse: All scripture is breathed out by
578 God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in
579 righteousness. Now, note these next two phrases: That

580 the man of God may be complete.

581 If you take the scripture, and you understand it, and you allow it to teach, reprove,
582 correct, and train you, you can be completely righteous. I'm not saying you're going to
583 become that in this life. But the fact that you're not that isn't because you don't have the
584 material, you see what I'm saying?

585 He goes on to say the following phrase: Equipped for every good work. There's not a
586 good work that you're not going to be equipped for in the bible. What I'm trying to say to
587 you is: the bible is sufficient for you to be everything that God intends for you to be. The
588 bible is sufficient. We don't need anything beyond the bible. I think what, when Paul's
589 writing in Timothy, he's trying to give him courage. Timothy seemed like a kind of guy
590 that would from, time to time, need some courage. And I think what Paul's trying to say
591 to Timothy is, you got all you need in that inspired word of scripture.

592 Okay? Let's finish up. I'm going forever. Are you guys cool? You doing alright? All
593 right. Okay, all right.

594 Verse 28. I'm just going to make a couple comments here. Let me, let me refresh your
595 brains. Paul says: Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the
596 Holy Spirit has made you overseers — they're called — to care for the church of God,
597 which he obtained with his own blood. These are people... blood bought people. So you
598 better take care of them, they're blood bought people. I know that after my departure,
599 fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. How are the wolves gonna
600 attack the flock? Verse 30: From among your own selves will arise man speaking twisted
601 things to draw away the disciples after them.

602 Not only do the overseers or the shepherds feed the sheep with the word of God, but they
603 also protect the sheep with the word of God, to keep the wolves away. Verse 31.
604 Therefore, be alert remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to
605 admonish every one with tears. Now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace,
606 which is able to build you up and give you the inheritance among, all those who are
607 sanctified. Again, he talks about his life: I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. I'm
608 not greedy. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to
609 those who were with me. I paid my own way. Verse 35: And all things I have shown you
610 by example. That by working hard in this way, we must help the weak and remember the
611 words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."
612 Paul was a generous man. A generous man. Verse 36: And when he had said these things,
613 he knelt down and prayed with them all. [Unintelligible] Verse 37: There was much
614 weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him...

615 [50:00]

616 ...Being sorrowful most of all, because the word he had spoken, that they would not see
617 his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

618 What a conclusion? You know, these days, with our technology, we don't have to go
619 through this in the same way, but they knew, we will never see this man again. He
620 planted the church through trials. He planted the church in tears. He has lived his life as
621 an example. He has spoken to us the word of God, and we're never going to see him
622 again. He has commended – How are we going to take care of the church? Right? He's
623 commended us to God and to the word of his grace.

624 I think because of that phrase — “he's commended us to God and to the word of his
625 grace” — and everything else that we've said, it's important to conclude: There's no
626 human authority over the local church. Plurality of overseers.

627 Okay, one last thing. Can I do a little bit more?

628 [Crowd assents]

629 Ok. This is why we didn't do the other stuff.

630 Turn to Hebrews 13. Hebrews 13. We're going to look at verse 7, and then we're going to
631 skip to verses 17 and 18 for the sake of time. Although I'd love to teach you [inaudible].
632 Hebrews 13. Beginning in verse 7, skipping to verses 17 and 18.

633 Says this: "Remember your leaders. Those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider
634 the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. And then verse 17: Obey your
635 leaders and submit to them for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will
636 have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning for that would
637 be of no advantage to you. Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience.
638 Desiring to act honorably in all things. So, you'll note there, he uses the term *leaders*
639 plural. Again. *Leaders* plural. Not a leader, but leaders. Um, these leaders are likely
640 overseers because you'll know that they spoke the word of God to them, and they kept
641 watch over their souls.

642 And not only that, but they also seem to be men of character whose lives and whose faith
643 was worthy of imitation. Not to mention the fact that they must have held the office
644 because they are required to give an account. And so, for these leaders who are worthy of
645 imitation, who spoke the word of God, the people are to obey them and submit to them.
646 And this is the type of stuff that people hate to read, right? Obey them and submit to
647 them.

648 That word *obey*, in the Greek, literally is *to persuade*. 'To obey them' means 'to be
649 persuadable.' Okay, that's what that word means "to be persuadable." "To have
650 confidence in them" is another way to put it. This is a different word than the word
651 "obey" in Ephesians and Colossians, that is used of children with regards to their parents.
652 To follow through with a command, right? It's not that same word. It's a different word.
653 To be persuadable, to have confidence in your leaders who spoke the word of God to you.
654 And then "to submit." And the word, *to submit* means "to submit."

655 [Laughter]

656 It means, "To give way, to yield to, to defer to."

657 Uh, John Piper, who is just a great Bible teacher, he puts it this way: "Hebrews, 13:17
658 means that a church should have a bent towards trusting its leaders. You should have a
659 disposition to be supportive in your attitudes and actions towards their goals and
660 directions. You should want to imitate their faith and should have a happy inclination to
661 comply with their instructions."

662 I think it's very similar to First Thessalonians 5:12 and 13 where Paul says this: We ask
663 you Brothers to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and
664 admonish you and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace
665 among yourselves.

666 And I just think back to the way the Ephesian elders responded to the Apostle Paul. All
667 right, something like that. To esteem them, to respect them. So, you are to obey and
668 submit to the overseers, the plurality of overseers, according to what those words actually
669 mean, as hopefully I've described to you, in as much as they are speaking the word of
670 God to you.

671 [55:00]

672 Because the authority is in the word and not in the men. Okay, that's important. The
673 authority is in the word, not in the men. I don't have authority, nor do the other guys, in
674 myself. I only have it in as much as I am speaking to you, keeping watch over you,
675 according to the word. Okay? if there's something else that you want to know that you
676 can, what's it says there? Uh, consider the outcome of my way of life and imitate my
677 faith. But the authority is in the word and not in the men. The local church plurality of
678 overseers has a derivative authority from Jesus in as much as their reading quote "to his
679 word."

680 So, what this suggests is that there is no human authority beyond the scope of the bible.
681 It's important. No human authority beyond the scope of the Bible.

682 Now sometimes we talk about *relational leadership*, but if that's not precisely defined,
683 then it leaves the nature and the extent of authority ambiguous. Right? It leaves it... it
684 leaves it ambiguous. And when that's the case, people can be confused about what it
685 actually means to follow their leader. And it can foster dependency on a leader, result in a
686 leader overstepping, and it can make it difficult to resolve conflicts with the leader. If
687 that's the case, if that's ambiguous.

688 And uh, our overseers have decided that on any occasion that that's been true of how we
689 have led people in this church, we want to apologize and seek your reconciliation; your
690 forgiveness and your reconciliation tonight. Okay. If that's been true. Um, if we've been
691 ambiguous and overstepped, or gone beyond, or been difficult to resolve conflict with, or
692 whatever the case may be, we just want to acknowledge that. We want to ask for your
693 forgiveness. We want to be reconciled to you tonight. We'll be sticking around. We need
694 to have those conversations.

695 These leaders are keeping watch for the souls of the people in the church, as those who
696 will have to answer to Jesus. He says let them do this with joy and not with groaning for
697 that would be a no advantage to You

698 See, leadership in the church is supposed to be joy for the leader and an advantage to the
699 follower. And for those of you that have had good leaders, isn't it an advantage to you?
700 It's a tremendous advantage.

701 You had good parents. You had good bosses. You had good coaches, had good teachers.
702 You've had good pastors. What an advantage to you. And if you have a happy inclination
703 to, a happy inclination to follow them, well, it'll be a joy to them.

704 And guys, that's what the vast majority of leading in this church is like. I look out at you
705 guys and I think, [sings] Joy joy joy joy joy joy joy!

706 [Laughter]

707 And I thank you for that. But if we get off track with the word of God, then you come and
708 kick us. All right? We mean that. That's how we endeavor to do it. Because... and you
709 can pray for us, because we want to have a clear conscience and we want to act honorably
710 in all things. I tucked my shirt in, I'm trying to act honorably here.

711 [Laughter]

712 In all things, we want to have a clear conscience according to the word of God, because
713 we know we're going to answer to Jesus. And I tremble about that. But the good thing
714 about expository preaching is, every Sunday, I get a fresh vision of his glory. And I think,
715 that's the chief shepherd laying down his life for me, and I'm ready to do it again another
716 week for this church. For Christ's sake. Because he is beautiful. And he is glorious. And
717 it is, it is such an honor and privilege to be one of the overseers, one of the pastors, of this
718 church.

719 It is such a joy, and I hope for you it's also an advantage. Our desire is to act honorably
720 and have a clear conscience.

721 So, to follow your leaders, is to respect and esteem, to have confidence in or defer to, the
722 plurality of Godly overseers as they speak to you and keep watch over your soul,
723 according to the word of God. That's what that means.

724 Okay. Now I've been at it for an hour.

725 Hopefully that makes sense to you of church government and church leadership. And
726 what I want explain to you really is what our plurality of overseers have concluded over
727 time together as we've asked the question, "What does God say?" After our convictions
728 about these things begin to solidify. We started to implement some of the changes in our
729 practice.

730 [01:00:00]

731 I mean, how many weeks into the Gospel of John are we? Hopefully you're not tired of it
732 yet.

733 And we realized that we needed to have some conversations about our beliefs and
734 practices with some of the leaders in our Network. And they listened to us, and they
735 considered it, and they deliberated upon it. But recently they concluded that what we
736 were doing was a significant departure from how The Network has historically operated.
737 And so, I think that assessment is probably fair. Some of you may recognize a little bit of
738 a difference. I think that that assessment, everything I've laid out for you, how we're
739 doing things, it is a little bit of a departure, isn't it? A significant departure.

740 And so, the question is, "Well, now what? Now, what?"

741 Should we do church the way we've historically operated and we're in line with the values
742 of The Network, or should we continue to lead the church according to our biblical
743 convictions? We unanimously agreed that since the authority for Vine Church rested in
744 the local church plurality of overseers, and we were responsible or accountable, for
745 leading Vine according to the word of God as best we can, that we had to move on. And
746 so, here we are. And... in some sense, it's just what was necessary to do.

747 We don't have any ill will towards anybody. We wish the best for everybody. And I
748 believe, and all the other overseers do as well, that everyone has to follow their biblical
749 convictions, even if they're different. That's why they blessed us to go and that's why
750 we're grateful to them.

751 And guys, we wouldn't be here without the sacrifice of so many people whom we love. I
752 always talk about turning 40. I don't know why, I just do, but... I was saved at Vine
753 Church when I was 20. Half my life. And I didn't know up from down, really. And my
754 life was changed forever. How many of you that's your story? Your life just changed
755 forever. And there's people who sacrificed tremendously that this place would be here,
756 and you could come in, just as you are, and hear clearly about Jesus and what it means to
757 follow him. And I'm thankful for that. Aren't you thankful for that?

758 I've been married for 15 years. I asked Celia on our first date right over there. After team
759 Vine. Maybe we'll go on a date tonight, babe. There's still many of my closest friends I
760 made in this church. And in this group of churches, and I know that's the case for so
761 many of you.

762 And I hope that you retain all of your friendships. Because, you know what? We're not
763 just affiliated with The Network. We're affiliated with Jesus Christ. Were citizens of the
764 kingdom of God. Were members of the household of Godly brothers and sisters in Jesus

765 Christ. And you should retain all of your relationships with your loved ones. Absolutely,
766 absolutely. That's the case.

767 At the end of the day, our identity is not in a group of churches or even in a local church.
768 I hope you all stay here forever.

769 [Laughter]

770 I doubt you will, but some of you, it'll be necessary for you to move on to other cities.
771 And I hope and pray that you're a blessing to those churches and a joy to those leaders. I
772 know that you will be.

773 But our identity is not in a group of churches or even a local church, but our identity is in
774 Jesus Christ. Amen?

775 [Applause]

776 So, here is the overseers' pledge to you: We're going to move forward with our hands
777 folded in prayer and our bibles open for study. Seeking the help of the Holy Spirit. The
778 plan is for us to keep gathering every Thursday as a plurality of overseers, asking the
779 question: "What does God say about _____?"

780 [01:05:00]

781 And you can rest assure that we'll continue preaching Jesus from the bible, loving one
782 another with sincere affection, operating in all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and looking for
783 opportunities to plant more healthy, local churches. If you like Vine Church now, you're
784 going to like Vine church in the future.

785 If you feel confused, our pastors are here to help you make sense of it with the bible. You
786 feel sad? Our pastors — one of them can help me, maybe. Our pastors are here to comfort
787 you with prayer. But, most importantly, Jesus is here with us by his Spirit. And Jesus is
788 the one that we're all about. Peter's confession about Jesus is the rock upon which we're
789 going to build Vine Church. Jesus is the cornerstone upon which this Temple is going to
790 be constructed, and Jesus is the foundation upon which this house is going up.

791 I was telling my wife these verses a few days ago: "According to the grace of God given
792 to me" — this is First Corinthians 3:10-11, Paul Speaking again — "according to the
793 grace of God given to me like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation. And someone
794 else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay
795 a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

796 And as soon as I told her about that, my phone buzzed and somebody said — one of you,
797 no idea what was going on — said, "Been praying for you and these verses came to mind.

798 First Corinthians, 3:10-11.” And I thought, you know what? We're gonna build Vine
799 church on the foundation of Jesus Christ. There is no other Foundation. We're doing it all
800 because of Jesus, in order to become like Jesus for the glory of Jesus.

801 I was gonna save this for vision night, but can I roll out to you our new purpose
802 statement?

803 [Crowd assents]

804 You can put it on the screen.

805 “Vine church exists to glorify God by living in joyful surrender to Jesus our King”

806 [Applause]

807 The future of Vine church is in the mighty hands of Jesus, our King. Amen? Let's build
808 that Foundation together. Why don't you stand. I'm going to pray and I'll pray over us
809 today.

810 Jesus, I thank you for Vine Church. Would you bless Vine Church? Would you bless this
811 church? We pray that you'd [inaudible]. Lord, I pray that I can turn forty and serve you
812 another forty. I pray for the next wave of leaders. Would you bless Vine Church. Thank
813 you that the church is your body. Thank you that the church is your bride. We thank you
814 that the church is your citizens in your kingdom.

815 We pray not only will you bless Vine Church, but that you would bless all churches that
816 are [inaudible] of the churches. Bless them, Lord. Bless them, Lord. We pray that you
817 would give all of us wisdom, that you give us strength. Pray that you would give us...
818 love, for you and for one another, and for our community that doesn't know you. We ask
819 that you would keep us always building upon the foundation of the Apostles and the
820 prophets, and Christ Jesus the cornerstone. And Jesus, we pray that you would be
821 glorified in everything we do, and that you would receive our worship now.