

Deuteronomy: Wholehearted Love

The First Session

Deuteronomy 1:9-18

Now, I'd invite you to turn in your Bibles as the children are released for children's worship to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter one, verses nine through eighteen. That's Deuteronomy, the fifth book in the book of Moses, the Pentateuch, verses nine through eighteen. And I would invite you to come back this evening, where we will be in our second sermon in the series on the gospel of Mark, we'll be looking at how Jesus is bringing his kingdom to bear in the early stages of his ministry in the gospel of Mark. So come back and join us this evening, for then I'd also encourage you to come back, because we'll be having Lord's Supper this evening as well. So this is a good chance for you to participate in that sign and seal of the covenant. So here we turn to Deuteronomy chapter one, verses nine through eighteen. And this is Moses speaking...

At that time I said to you, I am not able to bear you by myself. The Lord your God has multiplied you. And behold, you are today as numerous as the stars of heaven. May the Lord, the God of your fathers, make you a thousand times as many as you are, and bless you as he promised you. How can I bear my by myself the weight and the burden of you and your strife? Choose for your tribes wise, understanding and experienced men. And I will appoint them as your heads. And you answered me. The thing that you have spoken is good for us to do. So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and set them as heads over you commanders of thousands, commanders of hundreds, commanders of fifties, commanders of tens, and officers throughout your tribes, and I charged your judges at that time. Here the cases between your brothers and judge righteously between a man and his brother, or the alien who is with him. You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's. In the case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it. And I commanded you at that time all the things that you should do.

This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

Well, in this passage we find Moses now coming to the issue, the problem of leadership. And here we find that his experience is like many leaders, particularly ones who find themselves coming out of a very harrowing time to a normal time. How do you go from the plagues in Egypt and the Red sea and then the meeting of God at Mount Sinai? How do you go from that to the regular day to day of moving the people of God forward to take on the blessings of the Promised Land that the Lord has laid before them? And so Moses is encountering this problem of leadership. And many of you all have experienced this problem as well. When you go from a position of not being in leadership to a position of being in leadership.

I remember when it first happened to me, when I was first given, or I might even say at the time, I would have told you it was forced upon me, the gift of leadership, the calling to be a leader. I remember as the summer after my sophomore year in college, and I was working construction,

and the way that the head of our construction team did it is that he put the crew together, and he let us work together for about two weeks. And then at the end of the two weeks, he pulled me aside and he said, okay, I've decided that you're going to be the leader of this crew, right? And now at the time, I took this as kind of like a reward, like I had done good work and now I was getting rewarded with leadership. It was like getting a report card. You know, it said A+. Okay, you did a good job. You get to be now the leader. And so I said, yeah, I'd love to do that. Yeah. Please. Great. I'll be the leader of the team. Little did I realize though, what that actually entailed. It wasn't long after that that I realized that this changed a lot of things. Being the leader, I was no longer one of the guys. I was now one of the, quote unquote, them that the guys are talking about, right? When I'm not around. It changed my relationship to the team, and it changed the way that I got to operate on a day to day basis, because there's a cost to leadership. There's a burden to leadership.

So today we're going to talk about Moses's experience, his encounter with leadership, particularly the weight of leadership. First of all, the weight of leadership. Secondly, the wisdom of elders. And then thirdly, the way of discernment. Now, we always want to keep in the back of our minds as we're reading this that this is how Moses chooses to retell the stories about the beginning of the wilderness wandering. And so as we go along through these accounts in Deuteronomy one through four, we're going to be paying attention to why did Moses say it like this? Why does he take Exodus eighteen, which is a long story about the founding of the eldership right at the foot of Mount Sinai. Why does he take Exodus eighteen and then boil it down to these verses? Okay. It's something we should always be doing. What's the author doing when he tells it to us this way. But let's start with our first point the weight of leadership.

Okay, this is verses nine through twelve where Moses focuses on this. And this is Moses's realization that if they want to move forward as a community, if they want to move forward as a people of God, then they are going to need faithful leadership. But this is Moses realization. Faithful leadership presents challenges that can overwhelm the individual leader. Okay, now I want to be clear about this. We're talking about faithful leadership. Okay. There's all kinds of unfaithful leadership that's not overwhelming. Okay. Remember what a friend of mine who actually imagine this. He was in a denomination that was not very scrupulous about the faith of its pastors. And he was made a pastor, and he said, this is the best job in the world being a pastor. He said, all I do is I get up. I play golf all day with my parishioners. I think about the sermon for about fifteen minutes on Saturday, and then I go in and I preach it on Sunday, and they don't mind as long as they feel good at the end. And then guess what? We spend Sunday afternoon playing golf again. So this is the best job ever. And then he became a Christian. And then he realized, wait a minute, this is the hardest job ever. What have I signed up for? If I want to do this faithfully, right leadership can overwhelm the individual leader. Now, leadership is a topic that we hear talked about a lot, not just in the church, but out in the business world itself. I think that is indicative of the fact that that we all know that leadership is crucially important. And when it's not there, when it's not on offer, okay, it actually makes for a very difficult situation. As a matter of fact, many of us have been in organizations or in groups or in churches, perhaps where there wasn't great leadership. And what happens? People don't have

clear guidance as to what to do. They do what they want to do. And in order to protect their ability to do what they want to do, they build up walls around their area in the organization or in the church or in the ministry. What do they do? You start to have turf wars and you have silos. You hear about organizations having silos where people don't talk from one department to another, and you defend your ground and you make sure no one encroaches on your territory. And then what ultimately happens? The group becomes dissolute because there's not one person guiding it and directing it. You see, the lack of leadership can feel like freedom early on, but it often signals the slow death of an organization. That's how we learn that good leadership, good faithful leadership is actually a gift of grace to the people who are being led. It's a blessed thing. Don't despise your leaders wherever they are, but rather long for them. Pray for them. Support them to be good and faithful leaders because it will be for the better of the individual, the betterment of the individual, and the betterment of the organization. Leadership is crucial because leadership not only helps us work together for a desired end, but it does this remarkable thing. It helps us accomplish more than we would accomplish if we just added up all of our individual skills. I know that sounds kind of like business speak. Let me actually make a biblical argument for this idea. When Paul talks about the people that he's working with for the sake of the gospel, you've heard me say this before. He calls them co-laborers or fellow workers or fellow laborers.

The Greek word that's used there is that's a plural, and it means soon working with Ergon workers. Like ergonomic chairs, you know, or ergonomic keyboards. Right. Those are good keyboards for working. Okay. Soon or syn means with okay. So people who are working together his co-laborers. He describes his co-laborers in the way that they work together as a body, right? You know this about how the church is described by Paul as being a body with many different members. Now, this can be used as an analogy for business, no doubt, or for a nonprofit or for some other organization. But I just want to be clear about this. Paul is saying, if you are in the church, this is you. This is how the church works. You are many different body parts. One body under the head of Jesus Christ. Okay, so what does that mean? Hands are needed in the body. Hands do important things. Hands get work done, but the hand can't say to the eye, I don't need you, okay? Elbows are very important, but the elbow can't tell the knee. I don't need you. Right. Because having a bucket filled with hands is great, but they're not going to do much. However, if the hand is connected to the forearm, to the elbow, to the arm, to the body, all being guided by the head with eyes that can see so that the hand knows what it's doing, and ears that can hear so that the mouth knows what it's saying. Now suddenly, all of those different body parts can accomplish more than even the sum of all of their parts equals, right?

There's a thing that happens when good leadership takes place over an organization. It's almost like an act of creation, because you have the people in the organization, and then you have this new thing that didn't exist before, which is the organization itself. It's almost like the creation of a third person. Okay. And that's what Paul is talking about when he talks about his synagogue, his fellow workers, those who are by their joint work for the sake of the gospel, accomplishing more than they possibly could have by themselves or even than you would expect them to do if you just looked at them all individually and added them up. You see, good

leadership is crucial for the movement of the gospel. There's always a cost to the leader. Okay, leadership changes your relationship with people. Like I said before, you go from being one of the folks to now being one of the them, it changes your relationship to your own self-interest. You don't get to do all the things that you wanted to do before. Ask any mother or any father or any teacher or any Bible study leader. I don't get to just do all the things I want to do anymore when I'm put in a position of leadership, because now I have this other responsibility, which is the organization. It was it's the body, it's the family. It's the group. I used to teach Old Testament early on after I finished my PhD. I got to go teach Old Testament for a time, and there was a period of time where that's all that I did was teach Old Testament, and I loved it. It was great. This was my interest. I spent all that time and money getting those degrees because I love this stuff. I love talking about it. But then I got put in a position of leadership, and while I still got to teach Old Testament, I didn't get to do it nearly as much as I had before. I didn't get to think about it. I didn't get to focus on it nearly as much as I did before, because now I also had to think about the New Testament department and the history department and the theology department and the Student Life department, and in missions and development, because I wanted the whole organization to move forward. You see, when you become a leader, there's a cost to leadership. We sometimes romanticize it, thinking that it's really just about great personalities, kind of taking over these jobs and doing all the work because they have so many skills and so many gifts. And yet what we see here, what we see here in Moses, is that that's actually not what biblical leadership looks like. There's a cost to it, but the cost needs a remedy. The problem that arises out of the cost of leadership requires a solution. Even Moses, the guy who stood on the shore of the Red sea and put his staff in the water and separated the waters, swallowing up later the whole army of Egypt. Even Moses said, leadership is too much for me. The cost is too much. You see, good leadership recognizes in light of the cost, in light of the weight of leadership, good leadership recognizes that no leader has all of the gifts, no leader has all of the perspectives. No leader has all of the relational and emotional and strategic and structural energies to run an organization, particularly an organization of any great size. As a matter of fact, generally speaking, now in the church world, it's generally understood that you might be able to plant a church and run a church till it's about a hundred people or one hundred and fifty, but once it hits that number, you're going to need help. No one can actually have meaningful relationships and meaningfully shepherd more than that many people, and that's even stretching it. Okay, of course, in the Presbyterian system, we have all kinds of helps with that, right? And I'll come back to that later, because at the end of the day, that's what a lot of this is about. But the churches that are non-denominational and you're just putting the pastor out there, you realize that at some point you will not be able to bear up the weight of leadership unless other people come alongside you and help. And if they don't come alongside you and help, then you're not going to be able to be a very good leader. Okay, the group may still grow for a while, may even grow to large numbers, but it won't be healthy because you will not be able to do it without the help. You see, we need to recognize that Moses, even Moses, the great deliverer of Israel, recognized the need for a help. Now, I don't know exactly why. I just have to put this as an aside.

If you go back and you read Exodus eighteen, we learned that it's Jethro, Moses father in law who gives him this idea. Moses is kind of throwing his hands up in the air, saying, how can I do

this? I'm going to fail. I'm at my wit's end. And it's actually Jethro, this interesting character. He's kind of like Melchizedek in the Old Testament. He's a priest in Midian. He's sometime off scene, converted to Yahwism. We don't know. When was he already worshiping Yahweh as a priest of Midian? Okay. Which, by the way, means he's not an Israelite. He's out there in the Sinai Peninsula. And yet Moses goes out there, meets his daughter, and Jethro becomes like his main counselor, and he's a follower of the Lord. He's blessing Moses in the Lord. Okay? And yet then he kind of disappears. He's also sometimes called Reuel. He has different names. Like many people in the Bible, he's not unknown in different ways. So Jethro and Reuel, he's an interesting character, but Moses leaves him out of the story here, and it seems as if Moses just wants to get to the content in this retelling of the account. He just goes right to the content. And what's the content? What's the solution to the weight of leadership? It's the wisdom of elders. So let's look at verse thirteen and fifteen. You see what Moses learns from Jethro. But what he then charges to the Israelites is this shared leadership. Shared leadership can alleviate the weight of leadership by distributing the responsibility, the authority, and the accountability to other mature and equipped leaders. Okay, shared leadership can relieve the weight of leadership because that authority, accountability and responsibility is now distributed to others. You see, what Moses realizes is this true leadership does exactly what he's done. It recognizes that every leader has weaknesses, every leader falls short, every leader has strengths. And that's amazing. But because we are finite, you have strengths that also point to, to a certain extent, weaknesses in other places. You don't have strengths in every single area, and faithful leadership recognizes this. You can be a strategic leader, right? Doesn't that sound good to say someone's a strategic leader? That's a great thing. And yet you realize if you are just a person of strategy and you don't know how to deal with people, you're not a relational leader, then doesn't matter how strategic you are, sooner or later you're going to fail because you don't know how to actually help people follow you in the strategy. Or you could be a strategic leader who's now hired a good relational leader to work alongside you. But guess what? You don't have anybody who understands structure. I'm good with relationships, but I don't know how to order people in such a way that they can work well together to the same ends. And so you need a structural leader, a structural mind, who can come inside and help us out and help us think through things and how to actually organize people.

Well, teams are different than organizational structure, and you've got to be able to have both of those in play in every organization. This isn't just modern day business sense. This goes all the way back to the ancient Near East. Look at even here, how we have a little bit of an org chart placed in the middle of Deuteronomy chapter one, where he says, so he took the thousands and the hundreds and the fifties and the tens. He had and he had different titles. You have commanders and you also have officers. Okay. So there's some org chart stuff going on here. Okay. So what about when we hit a dilemma, a problem that we haven't seen before. Oh now I need a creative leader a thought leader, maybe somebody who's thinking creatively, who's able to kind of go out there and look at hard things and come up with creative solutions. Nobody can do all of these things, right? We need to have help. We need to have shared leadership. It's interesting that Moses recognizes this very quickly. Soon, as Jethro tells him back in Exodus eighteen, as soon as Jethro points it out, Moses says, yep, that's a good idea. I'm going to do it. And that sets the stage for the modern model of biblical wisdom that we,

excuse me, biblical leadership that we will see throughout the rest of Scripture. You need to be able to recognize your weakness, recognize places where we have failed. We need to be able to recognize where we don't have strengths and make the necessary hires and reorganization, so that we can fill out for the weakness of the leader. And that's not saying anything about the leader himself. They all have weaknesses.

Now, I do want to point out, look at the kind of people that Moses is told in eighteen, but here tells the Israelites they need to look for when they look for leaders. Look what it says in verse thirteen there. ***Choose for your tribes wise, understanding and experienced men, and I will appoint them as heads.*** Okay. I will appoint them as your leaders. Notice the characteristics that he's looking for. Notice he doesn't say, go find the biggest personalities you can find in your group. In your in your in your tribe. Who's the guy who has the strongest opinions? Go find the person who is the loudest talker. Who maybe even has kind of people sort of following him around, just waiting to hear what he's going to say next. Does he say that? No. Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that those things, I mean this. I'm not saying that those things also are deal breakers for leadership, but those aren't the credentials that he's looking for. You might find leaders who are wonderfully big personalities. You might find leaders who have wonderfully loud voices and are always voicing their opinions. That's fine, but that's not one of the credentials for leadership. There's all different kinds of leaders in the world. What does he say? Look for men who are wise. Look for men who know how to discern things. They know how to apply the fear of the Lord into the world around them and discern right from wrong decisions. I mean, I think we all kind of know what this means. Every one of us has people in our lives who are just wise. You know, they're the ones you think of when you have to make a hard decision in life and you think, I need to call so and so. And when they talk, that's the other thing. But this is true in the Bible too. When they speak, everyone goes, yeah, yeah, that's probably the right answer. You know you're in there, everybody's wrestling with a problem and someone raises their hand and you're like, good. Finally he's going to say something or she's going to say something. And then they say it and you go, yep, yep, that's the right answer. I can't believe we didn't see it, because that's the wise answer. It's a person who has discernment. But notice it's not just wisdom, it's also understanding. And I would say understanding is like the content of knowledge, right? You can have all the wisdom in the world. And yet if you don't know the matters that are in play in a particular decision, okay, then you can't apply your wisdom very well. You need to have understanding. You need to have content to your knowledge. What do a people who are moving through a wilderness towards a promised land? What do they need? Well, they need food. Where are we going to get food? They need water. Where are we going to get water? How do we deal with pregnancies? How do we deal with strife within the family? What do we do when a guy says that someone stole his manna, you know, when he wasn't looking? How do we deal with those kinds of decisions, you need to understand what's at play.

And then lastly, notice he's looking for people who have experience. You can even say experience is lived wisdom. He's looking for people who have figurative dirt under their fingernails. Right. Because they've been at work. They've got figurative calluses on their hands. Right. When you're looking for a leader, you want someone who's actually done the work of the

things that they're going in, the people that they are going to be leading. Okay. They've got some experience, some real world experience where they have failed, they have learned, they have developed, and they have grown. Right. Okay. When you walk into. You're going into surgery. You want a surgeon who's gotten some blood on their white coat before, right? You want to have somebody who's all their clothes are perfectly clean, and it's never been stained with any blood. You don't want that, right? Because you want them to have had some experience. Okay. The same is true with biblical leadership. I'd actually point this out. One of the ways you gain experience, if you're if you're someone if you're sitting out there and you're like, I would like to be a leader, I long to be a leader in life. You're a younger person, okay. We've all thought this way.

I remember one time when I was when I was working at the seminary, a guy came into my office. He was right out of college. I said, what do you feel called to do? And he said, well, I'd like to be one of those guys in the town that everybody comes to for advice. Okay. That's what he aspired to. And I said, well, that's a that's a good thing to desire. Okay. Uh, usually those men or those women have found something that they can do. Well, and then they do it really well. They really commit themselves to doing with excellence. And that's why people come to them for advice. Right. But you can't just jump ahead to that end goal, right? It takes some work along the way. I'd often tell our students who were going into pastoral ministry, I'd say, go find out how to be a good follower of leaders. One of the best ways to learn to be a leader is to learn how to be led. By the way, one of the worst credentials. One of the things I would say is a deal breaker. If a person can't be led, then they will not be a good leader. Okay, a good leader is someone who is also able to be led. So go out and get experience doing that. So notice it's not big personalities. It's not eloquence of speech. It's not strong opinions. Rather it is wisdom, understanding and experience that Moses holds out as the kind of folks we're looking for to come and be a part of this leadership team.

Now, I say that because I think as we look over the church as a whole, not just in the United States, but around the world. If we look at where most of the damage has done, been done to the organization of the church and to the name of Jesus Christ, it has not been from enemies without it has been from bad false leadership folks who made names for themselves for one reason or another. And it came out that much later that they were quite corrupt. And they were not leaders at all, that they were wolves in sheep's clothing, people who the church thought were leaders because oftentimes they came and told you that they were a leader and we just believed them. Or rather, they were a person who presented a model of leadership that did kind of look like Moses standing in front of the Red sea and putting down his staff. And we said, that's what we want, a stand alone guy. He's going to do it on his own. He's going to be in front of us. He's going to be strong. And what happened? We actually found out that he didn't really believe in biblical leadership because Moses's model for biblical leadership is shared distributed leadership. It's a plurality of elders. But instead we got lone Rangers, lone voices, people who were happy to take the authority of leadership but did not want the responsibility or the accountability. That's the three legged stool of leadership that many talk about. If you're going to give someone responsibility for a thing, you better give them authority to get the thing done so that you can hold them accountable when it comes to the end. But if you only have

two or one of those three things, then you're in a tough situation. It's a grace to your leaders to give them responsibility, authority, and accountability. A lot of leaders will take the first two. They'll even take responsibility. They'll take authority. But there are some who will say, I don't want accountability. Those are the ones to be careful of. You see, that kind of leadership only leads to cults. It only leads to ruin. It only leads to broken relationships. We want leaders who can be bothered with council collaboration and accountability. We want them to be bothered with it like Moses is. He's willing to bring in a team to work alongside him and notice it doesn't stop there. It continues on. As a matter of fact, there's kind of a sister verse to this, this story in the Old Testament, right after the salvation out of Egypt, we have this question about leadership and how do we make decisions and how do we move forward? Notice that in acts we have the same thing happen right after the victory over Satan, sin, and death? The grand act of Exodus in the New Covenant happens. We have a problem that comes and faces the early church in acts fifteen, and the problem is this they keep going out and preaching the gospel at the synagogues, out by the rivers. But guess what? It's the Gentiles who are converting. We keep speaking the gospel. Can you imagine?

You go down and you speak the gospel to one group of people in Birmingham, but everybody over here who you're not even talking to are the ones converting in. The Gentiles are coming in faster than the Judeans, and so they have to figure out, what are we going to do? So go read acts fifteen. It's the big great Jerusalem Council where Paul comes and Silas comes, and Peter's there, and James is there, and they're all bringing their cases. And what do they do? They bring their arguments. They put it before the community of elders. And then what do they do? They asked Peter, because he's the head of the church. They asked Peter what they should do. And Peter tells them, is that what happens? That's not what happens. Do they ask James, James, tell us what to do. This is you're the host church because we're in Jerusalem and James is the lead pastor of the host church. Do they ask James, James, tell us what we should do. And they gather together. They debate, they discuss, and then they vote. It's the most Presbyterian thing in the world that happens there. In acts fifteen. They all gather together and they vote, and James comes out merely as a spokesperson. He says, this is what we decided.

Okay. You see, even in the New Testament, we see this model of leadership. It's in acts fifteen. It's in first Timothy three, Titus one, first Peter five, where we get credentials for the kind of men who are called to be elders and officers in the church, I love it. I love the fact that our Presbyterian government gives us so, so many checks and balances that come right out of Scripture on how to lead our churches. It's not a perfect system. It doesn't mean that every once in a while, wolves won't slip through. And yet, when I talk to my friends who don't have this Presbyterian system behind them, they all say, man, that sounds really good. That sounds really useful. And it is. It's wonderful because it comes out of Scripture. So the weight of leadership leads us to recognize the wisdom of elders, which in turn underlines, interestingly, where Moses goes next. He says, I was under the weight of leadership. I was sold on the wisdom of elders.

And now let me pause for a moment and tell you the charge that I gave to those elders. It's interesting that Moses chooses to leave that part in. He doesn't put in Jethro, but he does leave in the charge that he gives him. And what's the charge? The charge is the way of discernment.

If you're going to be wise, if you're going to be understanding, if you're going to show your experience in the way that you're judging these cases, then you have to have the way of discernment. Wise leadership is biblically just not showing partiality, but applying dignity and fairness to fellow humans who are made in the image of God. Wise leadership does not show partiality, because that's the instant temptation. When you go out to the tribes and you say, give me your best men, and they give you the best men, there's going to be a temptation. It's there in all of us for them to say, well, I'm going to help my tribal leaders just a little bit better than I'm going to help your tribal leaders. The language for showing partiality in the Old Testament, by the way, is brilliant, and it's both in the old and the New Testament. But the way that the Hebrew says it in its vivid way, because Hebrews a very vivid language, usually it articulates abstract concepts through metaphorical language. I'm not saying that they would have always thought of the metaphor when they said this. It's just the way they talk. Like when we say, oh, she's running a fever, you don't realize that running in that phrase is a metaphor. And yet it does kind of tell you a little bit about what's happening when you say something like running a fever. Okay. Um, when they say showing partiality. The phrase that they use is actually this nasal lifting up of panim faces don't lift up faces. Imagine being in a crowd, and as you walk through the crowd, you're faced with all of these people that some of them, you lift them up just a little bit higher. Oh, that's my family member. Oh, they're a part of my tribe. Oh, they're in the same business I am. Maybe I can network with her later and make some business relationships. Oh, he loaned me money that time. Don't lift up faces and treat some with more honor, with more dignity, with more generosity than the others who don't have anything to offer you.

Okay. This is something that the Old Testament prophets talk about so much. It's kind of it's embarrassing. It tells us a little bit about what Israel wrestled with the most. It's something that Jesus talks about so much that we might even pick up the hint that it might be something we're going to deal with, too. Notice the teaching of the Old Testament. God says you must show fairness and dignity to all, especially the least. Why? Because I showed fairness and dignity to you, Israel. Even though you were the least. I didn't come for you because you were the greatest of the nations. I came for you because you were the least of the nations. Go live out that that modus operandi, right. Go live out that spirit in the way that you care for one another. And here's how I'm going to know if you're living out that care and love for one another. I'm going to put a little test like a, like a, like a detector in the middle of your community. It's going to be like a smoke detector, right? It smells smoke. It starts, the alarm goes off, and then you have to go try to find where the smoke come from. What's the problem? Okay, here's the smoke detector. In terms of mercy and justice in Israel, it is the people who have absolutely nothing to offer you. The orphan, the widow and the sojourner. Right now, as I say that, you're like, oh, yeah, that's all over the Old Testament, right? Why? Because the orphan doesn't have any landed inheritance. Why? About the widow? She's cut off now from the patriarchy of the system. It's through the husbands that the land is passed down. So she has no inheritance. What about the sojourner? Well, because they're not in the bloodline of Abraham. They're not given a portion of the land. And you see, in Israel, everything is around your portion of the land. And so these are three people, right? Three groups of people who have nothing to offer you. And so I know if you're getting it, I know if you're getting my love for you by

how you care for them. And if I come down and you're not caring for them, I'm going to have to care for them. And that's not going to be good. You don't want me to be the one caring for the orphan, the widow and the sojourner. You want me to come down and find that they are just fine? Jesus actually amps this up. What does he say in a different way? Matthew twenty five. As he's judging between the goats and the sheep, he doesn't just say, um, I'm going to see how righteous you are, how faithful you are. Rather by how you care for the hungry and the imprisoned, and the naked and the homeless and the orphan. I'm not just going to find out your faith from that. He amps it up. He says, when you see them, when you see the naked, when you see the orphan, when you see the imprisoned, you're seeing me. That's how you encounter my kingdom. It's not on glorious hills of battle. It is in those who have nothing to offer. You. Don't show partiality. This is a great call of discipleship and Christian discipline for us today. And I don't say that to be critical. I know that I myself struggle with this. I have to constantly ask myself, why am I doing this thing? Is it because it serves a self-interest of mine? Or is this because I am showing gospel love and generosity to others?

Now, don't get me wrong, I want to. I want to acknowledge this. We can only minister in the places that God has providentially placed us. So the message, the application of this point is not like don't care for anyone around you because that might in some way help, you know, kind of reflect back on you in some good way. I'm not saying that the Lord has providentially put us in neighborhoods. It put us in families. He's put us in cities that have specific needs. It's not showing partiality to respond to where the Lord has put you and care for those people who are immediately around you. And yet we should know there's always going to be the temptation to help those who can help us in some way. Maybe it's just making us feel better, because this is one of the ministries that our community considers prestigious, right? If you don't believe me, just watch the end of every one of those non-profit airings on PBS or NPR, and see all the lists of the family names who supported the thing. Why? Because you're also getting a little status bump when you do that too. This is why Scripture teaches us don't even let your right hand know what your left hand is doing. That way you can be sure to guard against partiality.

I was struck by this this week when I heard a story about one of our board directed ministries here at Briarwood. Um, it was about the ballet. And as you all know, the ballet is studious about offering and presenting and discipline the children who come through its doors in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, both in the studio, but also, if you've ever been to our larger gatherings and larger performances, the gospel message is always being given, and that's by design. But I want to point something out to you. You have to remember, a lot of the people coming to the ballet are not believers, or maybe they're nominal believers. And so it can kind of be awkward to be presenting the gospel all the time, right? You've all experienced this before. When think about that one time when you were going to say something, but you held back and didn't say it because you didn't want to create an awkward moment. And yet the ballet is so careful and so bold and so generous in its proclamation of the gospel that we have stories of, yes, girls and boys, but also parents and family friends who hear the gospel over and over again at these gatherings and at these performances, and find their hearts strangely warmed. That's a beautiful thing. You know, we could just come up here and just do ballet with excellence, and we do that. But we go beyond that and make sure that we're always offering a clear

proclamation of the gospel. It's the goal. It's the purpose. It's the vision statement of the Briarwood Ballet, as it is of all of our Briarwood Board directed ministries and all of our internal ministries, to proclaim the gospel and be about the work of discipling Christians. And we don't want to show partiality when we do that. We want to be equal opportunity evangelists.

You see, the way of discernment is a rejection of partiality. And this is true whether you're an elder in Israel's wilderness wanderings or you're a presbyter who's called to serve an assembly of worshippers known as the church, or you are an apostle who's trying to figure out what to do with all these dirty Gentiles who keep getting converted and coming into our churches back in acts fifteen, where you're a regular Christian who's just making decisions about their lives, how to run their family becomes pretty quickly early on that we all need help and that there's a wisdom, there's a wisdom to having a plurality of leaders or elders around us, as Moses reminds us here. And as we find reiterated through all of Scripture, we're called to be just and fair and to give care and show mercy, even sacrificially, as the Lord showed us mercy. And one way we do that is through faithful leadership. So the weight of leadership finds its remedy in the wisdom of elders. But the wisdom of elders is only properly applied when it follows the way of discernment, just as our Lord and Savior told us when he called us out of darkness, when he set us on firm ground, when he filled us with the Spirit at Pentecost, and then gathered around that work, the church which was led by the elders for the proclamation of the gospel around the world. It's the way it was back in the wilderness, wandering, and it's the way it is today.

Let's pray.

Heavenly father, as we do come before you, I pray, Lord, that you would give us ears to hear. I pray for the leaders in this gathering, because I know that every single person in this room is leading in one way or another, even if it's just in their friend group. There's opportunities to lead all around us. I pray, Lord, that we would steward the gift of self-awareness, that we would steward it well, recognizing our weaknesses and seeking to be around people who compliment who we are and who you've made us to be, particularly as we're in the work of leadership. I pray, Lord, that you would bless our leaders here at this church. Give them wisdom, watch over them. This new class that was just installed last week. Lord, I give thanks for them. I give thanks that there are still wise and understanding and experienced men who are able to serve and want to serve in this work of the church. I pray that you would strengthen them and protect them and watch over them. And I pray, Lord, for all of us who have been transformed by the work of Jesus Christ, who did not show partiality, coming only for the leaders of Jerusalem and the wealthy people in the city. But as he says himself, I did not come for the healthy. I came for the sick. Lord, I pray that we would reflect the same kind of discernment in how we are fair and generous in our showing of mercy, justice, and love. Help us to do that.

In Christ's name we pray.

Amen