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SPEAKER

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Between Two Worlds

PART

17

TITLE

Caring For God's People

SCRIPTURE

1 Peter 5:1-5



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Well, if this is your first or maybe your 50th time, we welcome you next week to learn a little bit more about how you can find your place here at Providence. We're so glad to see you. It's always a joy at Providence. And if you're a guest with us, we're glad you're here. If you have in your hand a Bible, if you want to turn with me to first Peter. We're in a series, walking verse by verse. We happen to be up to chapter five and verse one. And so I invite you to turn there. In just three weeks, we're going to finish first Peter, at least our time in it. And then on August the 22nd, it will be a special Sunday, when we have the opportunity to simply look back and to recount some of the amazing things that God has done by his grace in our own personal lives over the last year. It's important for us to celebrate what he's done. And then on the 29th, it's a really special Sunday. And I want to ask you to prioritize that Sunday.

Over the last year to a year and a half, we have prayed and sought the Lord's direction as to where we should be moving as a church family in the years to come. And I get the opportunity to share that with you on August the 29th. That really is an important Sunday. And so I'm going to ask you to do something that I've only done one other time in all the time I've been at Providence. And that is, I want to ask you to listen to that sermon. I want to ask you to be here on that Sunday, if it's at all possible. If it's not, if you're at home, we're also glad that you're here this morning. And if you are at home on that Sunday, please tune in. And if you cannot listen to it on that Sunday, by Tuesday it'll be online. And I would ask you to simply listen. If you call Providence your home, and if this is a place where you're considering investing your life, I would love and ask you to prioritize that.

So let me pray for us, okay. Father, as we come to you and to your word, we thank you that this is the word of God. And we come to you, the God who gave us the word. I ask that you would pour out your spirit upon us. We thank you for the privilege to sing to you, and to listen, and to open your word, and to be examined by you. And we confess that what you're going to find are many, many hearts that are bound by the vines of apathy and fear and indifference and unbelief. And I ask that, by the power of your spirit this morning, that you would word to clip those vines, to liberate our heart, to liberate our love and our faith and our affection, our admiration for you. I ask, God, that you would give us grace as we think about living life in community, how we help one another endure this morning, as brothers and sisters in Christ. And so we love you. We need your help. Speak to us, we pray, in Christ's name. Amen.

With the exception of their ability to make wool, I cannot think personally of a less impressive four legged animal than a sheep. There's something about a sheep to me, I just look at, and they're just so untimidating. It's amazing that people... Well, I'll just move on. They're defenseless. They get quickly disoriented. It's amazing, a sheep, I don't know if you know this, but if they're left untended and unkept, they actually will get so much wool built up, and so much dirt, that they become so top heavy, they fall over. They don't have the strength to pick themselves back up. They need a shepherd. They need somebody around them all the time.

And what's amazing is, when you look through the scriptures, and when God says, You know what, let me describe humanity with one particular animal. The one that he uses more than any other is a sheep. In Isaiah, he says, "All of us, like sheep, have gone astray." Jesus, in Matthew chapter nine, he looks at the crowd and he has tremendous compassion on them. And he says, and this is why, it's because they were helpless. And they were harassed like sheep without a shepherd. Sheep. Peter is writing Christians who are vulnerable. And they're vulnerable in two different directions. One direction is because they're sheep, just like you and me. They get lost, disoriented. They're defenseless. Sometimes we fall over and we can't pick ourselves up. And so he knows that these Christians, that just because they're human, and fallen, and imperfect, sinful. They make decisions, and they fall over, and sometimes they can't get up. They're vulnerable.

But his audience has another area where they're vulnerable. And that is that they're being persecuted for their faith. They're living in a culture where now they've been exiled away from their spaces and places where there's accountability and support. Many of them have gone into certain regions and cities in order to preserve their physical life. And sometimes together, they form little churches. And he knows that they're vulnerable. They're living in a culture that's hostile to their faith in Jesus Christ, and their lifestyle that accords with those doctrines, and with that gospel.

He knows that God is chief shepherd. And he knows that God has given them shepherds. But he also wants each other to protect and help one another wherever they're at. He's acting like a shepherd seeking to protect and strengthen the brothers and sisters in Christ. And yet he knows that he's a distance away. And so he's calling upon people within those churches to read his letter and to acknowledge that we're all a vulnerable people and we need one another. And this is what he says, starting in verse one. "So I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed. Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you. Not for shameful gain, but eagerly. Not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears you will receive the unfading crown of glory."

Now it's obvious that when we get to this part of the letter, he's addressing elders. Elders are men who are called by God, and then affirmed by the local church, because of their character and endurance in the faith to shepherd the church, to lead and protect the church. You open up the Bible. And what you find is there's actually three different words, titles, that describe one office. They're used interchangeably. Those words are elder, pastor and overseer. Ironically, in our own text, we read each of them sometimes in a verb form. You notice it says, I exhort the elders to shepherd. That's the same word, pastor, exercising oversight. And so all three functions are all at play in the text that we have.

But oftentimes when the new Testament wants to highlight the character qualities of a mature Christian that fills that office, they use the word elder. Elder even sounds old, doesn't it? It's because it's someone who has walked with the Lord for a period of time. And so there's age that's walking with Christ that causes us to grow mature. And then there's the word pastor. And pastor, it means to shepherd, or to feed, or to teach. And so, it's those individuals that are thinking about sheep like they need food and they need water and they need shelter and I need to protect them. But then there's another, and it's the word overseer. And when it's used, it's typically highlighting the role of these elders in leading and guiding the church in a particular direction to accomplish the mission that God has given her.

Here at Providence, we typically don't use the word overseer here. But we have elders and pastors. There's 10 of each. And the fact is, they're actually one group called to do all of these things. But what we do is, we simply call, on the basis of the word, words that are a little bit different depending on the function. So here at Providence, if you're wondering, we have 10, we call them lay elders. They don't work at Providence. They're not paid a penny for all of their work. And they work outside the church. And yet they serve and they lead and they help in tremendous ways. Many of them are going to serve you the Lord's supper here in a few moments. And we also have pastors. And pastors work at the church. And they typically lead ministry areas of our church family. And so pastors and elders.

And what's interesting is, you look through the scriptures at who's qualified to do this, who should be affirmed to do this. And there's two different lists, one in first Timothy and one in Titus. And they're combined. And what you find there is a bunch of character criteria, with the exception of two things. It's interesting that, with these two exceptions, every other thing is called upon for every Christian. The elders are supposed to be able to be, they are apt to teach. And we're also told that they're not supposed to be new Christians, lest they be tempted and they get proud because of their place. With those two exceptions though, what's interesting is, every other qualification of character is elsewhere in the new testament, instructed and commanded for all Christians.

Let me give you an example. When you look at the 21 characteristics that are supposed to be seen in an elder, they'd show you three of them. One of them is self controlled, one of them is sober-minded, and one of them is hospitable. Now we've just been studying first Peter. And if you remember back, in chapter four, verse seven, he says, "The end of all things is at hand. So what should we do? All of us, be self-controlled and sober-minded." Skip one verse, down to verse nine, and he says, "And be hospitable without grumbling." In other words, elders are not super Christians. They're just affirmed by other Christians as real Christians. They're just walking with the Lord, like the rest of us.

So why this is so important is for this reason, if they were a super segment of the church, then many of us, all but 20 of us, we'd go, "Well, this sermon is clearly not for me." And yet Peter writing, directing his attention in a public letter that was going to lots of different churches, and addressing these individuals for how they're stewarding the responsibility of leadership. What Peter does is, he gives instructions to all Christians of how

we're supposed to lead one another, and care for one another, shepherd one another, encourage one another, in order to help each one of us who are vulnerable get home.

And this is what he teaches. And so, this is really for all of us. And this is what he teaches us in these verses. The first thing is that our care for one another should include careful examination, careful self examination. This is true for elders, pastors. This is also true for any Christian, that when we think about how we care for one another, it should be marked by careful self examination. And there's a reason for that. And it's this. Every single one of us were trained from an early age that we have a front of house and a back of house. We have a showroom and a storeroom. We clean one and Polish one because other people see it. We expect them to see it. But then there's a curtain separating the two. And the back is kind of a mess, right? And so our heart oftentimes, our life oftentimes, we hide portions. It's sort of in that store room, the back of house. And we're pretty skilled at keeping people at the right side of the curtain. Here's the deal. God always sees both sides of the curtain.

Every now and then somebody accidentally stumbles into the back. You become irritable in front of someone. You're like, "Ooh, I'm so sorry. It's not really who I am." No. It's exactly who you are. You're just polished every other time. But right then, they saw. They saw. But God sees everything. And there was a time, a real time in history when God actually goes to one of his prophets named Ezekiel and he says, Ezekiel, I want to take you on a tour. You don't believe me, you just read Ezekiel eight and nine. You read the whole thing. I want to take you on a tour, a sightseeing tour. "Really? God, what are we going to go see? We're going to see some monuments and some buildings." "No, we're not going to see anything like that. What I'm going to do is I'm going to take you to different parts of the city, to my people. And I am going to remove that curtain so that your eyes are able to see the sin in the people's hearts that I see all the time."

And I'll say, wow, this is going to be a hard tour. So they go over and he goes, Look. And he removes the veil. And suddenly, Ezekiel is able to see all this idolatry of people worshiping stones and rocks instead of worshiping the one true God. And he's devastated. And he goes, "Don't be too devastated. Let's move on." He goes to the next. And he says, "Do you see this?" And all of a sudden, he unpacks what all these people are doing in the dark places of their life, and all kinds of immorality and idolatry, all kinds of sin. And he said, "Wow, this is a terrible tour." And he goes, "It's going to get a little bit worse."

And you get to chapter eight, verse 12. And he goes, "Let me show you something else." He says, "Do you see what the elders of Israel, the spiritual leaders, the teachers, the people who are supposed to be overseeing, caring, providing, protecting the people. Do you see what they're committing in the dark?" Up until this time, Ezekiel couldn't. And he unpacks what the spiritual leaders are doing when no one else can see, thinking, not only can nobody else see, but the Lord doesn't see us either.

And what you find next is one of the most devastating chapters, really, in the whole Bible. And it demonstrates one very, very particular sobering thing for anyone who wants to care for anything that is God's. And that is this, you are not getting away with it. Whatever it is that you're doing, that nobody else knows. And you think I've done it for a decade now and still nobody knows. And there doesn't seem to be a consequence. I still have my job. I'm still making money. I want you to know something. There is a day coming. You will not get away with that. You will stand before him who sees everything.

And what he does next is one of the most devastating chapters. I said this already. It's so sobering. You get to chapter nine and God says, "You know what? Every time you see the engine of the train go by, and that engine is hidden sin, unrepentant sin." It says, "I want you to know there's always a caboose at the end of that train. And that caboose is judgment. And so we get to chapter nine in Ezekiel. And he says, come on over here. And he calls an angel. And he says, I got a task for you. And this is what he says.

He goes, "I want you to go. And I want you to put a mark on the foreheads of men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in it." In other words, he tells an angel and he says, "I want you to go through the city. And everybody who's disturbed by the moral condition of what they see. I want you to mark them." And this is why. Because after that one, I'm sending others. And to the others, he said, "Pass through the city after him and strike." It's judgment. "But touch no one on whom is the mark." The mark being, this is somebody that's grieved over the godlessness in the city. I can imagine the angels going, man. It's a big city and a lot of people, where do we start?

And he says, "I want you to start at the sanctuary." I want you to start with the people who teach the Bible. I want you to start with the worship leaders. I want you to start with the life group teachers. I want you to start with the people who were closest at the time to where the sacrifices were being made. And you start there and see if those people grieve over the sin in the world and the sin in their own heart. You see, what I hope you can see is this, why are you so uptight about this? This is why. It's because anytime we touch a Christian, we interact, we teach, we effect a church, a Christian, that church, that Christian resides in the hand of God. Peter says that the church is the possession of Jesus that's been purchased by his blood.

And so listen, if your kids are Christians, then your instruction of them. You're touching someone in the hand of God. If you're a teacher, if you're a counselor, if you're an instructor, if you just happen to be a friend of other Christians, and you want to give them advice, you want to encourage them, you want to pray for them. Remember the whole time, I need to do this with a clean heart. And the reason is because I'm entering into a realm, a world where this person lives, and that world is the hand of God itself. So you have to enter in holy. Confessing your sins, so that he forgives you, so that you can minister to people with a pure heart and a clean conscience.

You see, the church can mistakenly reward, polished pride and greed. And one of the reason it can, and does so frequently, is because God gives us this amazing instruction. He says, I want you to distinguish yourself

by love. And so, you know exactly what love's supposed to look like. He gives us all these characteristics, in first Corinthians 13, two of which are this. I want you to love in such a way that you hope in people and trust people.

When you get a snake into a nest and that nest has been instructed to trust and to hope. It's really easy for people to stand near the sanctuary, and minister near the sanctuary with the people of God, and know that they're all supposed to trust me. And so I can take all my pride and all my greed and all my lust and I can simply polish it so that it's not offensive, and they'll even praise me for it.

And so what Peter wants us to know is something that's so simple. And it's, sheep may be fooled, but the chief shepherd cannot. So when you think about all these things, is it any wonder then that Peter would say, in chapter four, verse 17, he says, "Look, it is time for the judgment to begin at the household of God." And then he would follow that up with, "So I exhort the elders among you." And so, let me encourage us to never lose sight of our heart as we seek to care for others. Never lose sight of self-examination when we seek to minister to the church.

You see, anytime we have a task in life, we look for a tool. If you're a mechanic and you're like, "This is a problem. I need a tool." I just started working with a wood lathe at the house. And I have a lot of fun with it. And it's interesting, as sometimes I'm working, I have lots of different tools. And I'm putting on there. And it's getting certain angles. And every now and then I'm like, "What's the right tool, right tool for this thing right here?" And this is what I found out, is the most important tool on the wood lathe is actually, it sounds weird, but it's my heart. The reason is because my hands are connected to the heart. There's been times out of frustration. I'm just frustrated about something. So I'll go out and I'd wood lathe. And all of a sudden I'm just pushing on that thing. And the fact is, I can take the right tool and I can have a wrong effect on that wood.

When it comes to your ministry to other people, your most important tool is a healthy soul. A healthy soul holds the tool. It picks the tool correctly, but then also navigates that tool so that the right tool is being applied with the right pressure, in the right place, in order to help the people of God. So how's your soul? Those of you who are pastors and elders in this room, how is your soul? There is no such thing as a healthy soul that's not born again. Jesus said, John chapter three, verse three, he says, "Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The most important ministry tool is a healthy soul.

I want you to think about something. I want you to think about something. It's Matthew chapter seven. There was a time that Jesus actually said these words. He says, "Look, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name?' And then I will declare to you, I never knew you. Depart from me." What that means is that there will be real men and women on a particular day who are going to reminisce and speak to Jesus about ministry that was done in his name, before being sentenced to the hell they told others to avoid. This is all so serious. It's all real.

You look around the church today. And the reason that one of the greatest problems with the church is, the leaders don't read the old Testament. This is not a show. The healthiest tool for the church is a pastor, not with gifts of charisma and teaching and resources, but he has a healthy soul. And so it is with every life group, every children's group, every student group, every counseling, every support group. A healthy soul. Is your soul healthy? Is it born again? It has to start there. Is it born again? You say, well, how do I even know? Well, the Bible says that if you admit your sin, admit you need a savior, you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, and confess him as Lord, he causes you to be born again. He takes the gospel. He brings new life into your soul.

We talked about this earlier. But sometimes you say, "Well, how do I know if I'm born again?" Well, let me ask you this. How do you know if you've been born? Is the greatest proof that you were born that you have a birth certificate or that you're currently breathing? It's breathing, right? Someone said, "Hey, are you born?" See. Someone says, "Hey, how do you know you're born again?" Well, the greatest evidence is not that you can point to a date that was inscribed on a Bible, but that there are signs of spiritual life in your life today. Do you love Jesus today? Do you love his word today? Do you love his people today? Are you repenting today? Do you have a hunger for his word today?

You see, what all this does in each of our lives is it causes us to examine ourselves to say, am I born again? And if I am, is my relationship with the Lord current? And is my relationship with the Lord clean? I remember years ago, my son Caleb, he's now in the Marines. He was 10. He had just started reading the Bible for himself, like books of the Bible. And he's like, "Dad, I'm going to read James." I said, okay. I forgot about it. He comes to me one day and he goes, "Dad, are you a teacher?" And I said, well. I was thinking like teacher, school. And I said, "Well, sort of. Why are you asking?" He goes, "well, I've been reading. And it says here that not many of you should presume to be teachers because those who are, will be judged more strictly. Are you one of those?" This is what he says.

And I said, "Well, yes. I am one of those." He said, "Well, why in the world? Why in the world would you do something that you know you're going to be judged more strictly?" And I said, "Well, it's because he told me to do it. And if I don't do it, it's sin." He's 10. He's trying to figure out ways of the Lord. He goes, "Let me get this right." He goes, "You're telling me that God tells you to do something. If you don't do it, it's sin. If you do do it, you're going to be judged more strictly?" I said, "Yeah, that's about right." I said, "But the Lord has said that if I stay close in a relationship with him and clean before him with repentance, that he'll help me." And my little Caleb, at the time, now he's not so little anymore. He says, "Well, then you better stay close and clean."

Now listen to me. We need to stay close and clean. If you're going to touch a Christian in any way, bless them, teach them, help them. Self-examination must be a part. Second thing. Our care or one another should be marked by willing sacrifice. You see, how we view something, whether it's a car or a pet or a person affects the level of our care and stewardship of that something. And there are a few things there was precious to Peter as

God's people. That's why he kept saying, Look, these are a chosen people, a royal people, a precious people, a holy people, a blood bought people.

So he looks at these elders and he looks at us and he says this is how you should treat them. He says, "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you." So this is what he does. He says this is the calling that we have for elders and for Christians. And then he says, he's going to give us three different couplets. He says, don't do it this way. Do it this way. The first one is, not under compulsion, but willingly. In other words, instead of seeing the church as a compulsory burden, see it as a blessing to willingly serve.

Did you know that people know how you view them? Your kids know how you view them. You look at them, and in that moment you say you're such a burden in your mind. They know it, even without words. You teach the Bible and someone's a blessing to you, you tend to know it. When someone's encouraging you. You tend to know it. If you're on a date, you know if they want to be there with you or not, don't you? And so it is with the church. And so it is with other Christians. When we minister to other people, it's not supposed to be a compulsory exercise. When it is, it looks passionless, apathetic, cold. There's no vision. It's listless.

Then he goes on and he says, not only willingly. He says, but look, "Not for shameful gain, but eagerly." In other words, he says don't view the church as this generous people that's easy to exploit for personal gain. She's not a people you pedal for a paycheck or for fame or for power. Instead, view her as the treasure of God that you would want to eagerly serve. And then the third one, he says, "Not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock." Instead of seeing her as the people to lord over and manipulate, he says, see her as Christ's children, loved ones who need instruction and a model to follow.

So let me encourage us to consider if our sacrifice speaks of her worth. When I say her, what I'm talking about here is the church. Would somebody, if they could simply observe your life, would they think that you think highly of the church on the basis of how you serve her? If the curtain of your life could be pulled back and they could see all the investments in every way that you pour into God's people, would they be convinced that God's people are valuable to you? I hope so. I believe they are. I believe that you think they are.

The last thing before we take the supper is this, is that our care for one another should be explainable only by hope. By hope. This is such good news. And this is just run through. It's like a thread that just runs through the entire letter of first Peter, this picture of future hope, meaning we're going to live in such a way because of what's coming that's not here on the earth. Throughout the whole book, he's writing about a way of life and thinking and response to other people that can only be explained by having a hope beyond this life. For example, in chapter three, verse 15, if you remember, he says, "Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason, for the hope that is in you." Why would anyone ask you about hope? Because the life that Peter is calling us to live can only be explained by hope that this world knows nothing about. This world can only imagine hope by hope it gets in this world. But for the Christian, our greatest hope is what

comes in the next world and not in this world.

In chapter one, verse three, Peter erupts in worship. Now what would cause someone to do that? What would cause someone to go, you're doing that, you must hope in something? What are you hoping in? And Peter answers that question in verse three and four. And he says, this is why. "It's because he's caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance, not in this world, it's kept in heaven." It's waiting. The best part of being saved is still to come.

You get to chapter one, you get to verse six. And he tells us to rejoice in trials. I mean, what kind of nutcase does that? Like, Hey, I'm really going through a hard time. Yeah, this is wonderful. Why would anyone do that? He says, this is why. He says that, "The tested genuineness of your faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honor, not in this life, but when Jesus Christ returns." Chapter two, Verse four, he tells us to come and believe in a Christ who is rejected by the world. Why would anybody want to do that? Because chapter two verse six says that, "Whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." You, you may be put to shame in this world for following Christ, but not when you see him in heaven.

You get to chapter three, verse nine. He tells us that when people do evil to us to respond with goodness. Why would anyone do this? Because he says that, "To this you were called that you may obtain a blessing." A blessing not in this life, but the one to come. Chapter four, verse 13, he tells us to rejoice when we're persecuted, when we share the sufferings of Christ. Why in the world would anyone do that? He tells us that you may rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

So we get to this passage, chapter five, verses one through 40, talking about how we care and lead one another to help the flock of God. And he tells us to do it with purity and with innocence, and with self sacrifice. So in a world where leadership is predominantly known by coercion and greed and power, what could possibly make sense of this kind of leadership? Verse four. When the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Which means if our care for other people is motivated only by the rewards that we could get in this life. That leadership and care is defective. And even worse, it's non-Christian. Christian leadership is motivated not by what we get on earth, but heaven. It has even propelled Peter.

So notice in verse one, it goes, this is what I'm about. Notice what he's about. He says, "I exhort you. And this is who I am. I'm a fellow elder. I'm a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed." It's not been revealed yet, but it will. Even Peter says the godly wait for the greater reward.

So let me encourage us to set our hope on the reward to come. And when we see him, and we will, he will reward us as he has said. And those who have been rewarded by Christ will look at him and we will then take our reward and lay it at his feet and say, worthy are you, oh Lord and God. And this is why, because not only are you worthy, but you are enough for us. You have brought us to God. What else could we possibly need

with gold? Do you know how he brought you? Chapter three, verse 18 says, "Christ also suffered once for sins the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God." And that's what we get to celebrate now. What Jesus did in dying and rising again so that we could be brought near to God. On the night that he was betrayed, with his disciples, he took bread. He broke it. He gave thanks. And he says, "This is a symbol of my body. It's about to be broken so that you can have a relationship with God." And he takes a cup full of wine, looked just like blood. And he says, "This is a symbol of my blood that will be spilled when my body is broken, for the forgiveness of sins."

Anytime you take either of these two or both of these, you do this in remembrance of me. Now, this is really, really important. Anytime we do this, he says there's three reasons you should always do this. You should always examine yourself before you do it. That's what we're going to do. We're going to take some time in a moment. We're going to have a time simply to pray, to be quiet. And he says, you're supposed to remember, remember what he did. But then there's a third and this is beautiful. He says, you're supposed to proclaim. How we proclaim in the Lord's supper, is we proclaim without words. What that means is this, is that when you stand, as you will this morning, and you come forward, and you take that cup and you take that bread in your hand and you consume it. It is a non-verbal proclamation to everyone who might be observing you, that says, I want you to know that I proclaim I am a sinner. I need a savior. And Christ did it. He died on a cross and I believe he rose from the dead. I believe I'm saved. It's a proclamation.

The Bible says, if you have never trusted Christ, and when I beg you to do so now. You can do it right now, where you're sitting. You trust Christ and believe in him, are born again, you are welcome to this table. But if you've never trusted Christ, the Bible tells me to warn you not to take it, for to take it publicly is to publicly declare to others that you believe. So this is a time, if you're not ready to commit your life to Christ, to simply observe and think about what you've heard.

But for those of us who have trusted Christ, in just a moment, we're going to take a few extra moments. We have a little bit of extra time this morning. What we're going to do. We're going to take the supper. We're going to sing. We're going to contemplate. Not in that order. Reverse. In a moment, I'm going to give you time to simply be quiet before the Lord. There'll be some instrumental music that'll play. It'll just help you think. And we encourage you to examine yourself.

When you're ready, when you're ready, when your sins are confessed, and you say, I'm ready to come. You notice in front of each of your sections, there are seven tables and there are seven sections of chairs. We want to ask you to go to that table. We want to ask you to go to that table. I know this is some instructions, but so it doesn't get crazy, you just go clockwise in your little section. Okay? So if it's this section, you're going to come down this side, and you're going to go back the other side, okay?

At each of these tables, there's seven of them, even for those in the back, there'll be a pastor elder who's sitting there, or actually standing there, to serve them to you. When you receive it, we encourage you to go back to your chair. And then whenever you're ready, go ahead and take those elements. At some point in time, we'll be singing. And if you're still coming down, or if you're still sitting, we invite you to sing with us. If for whatever reason you cannot physically come forward, you simply raise your hand. We'll make sure that we bring it to you. So let's take a moment now. Let's take a moment to pray, to examine our hearts. And then when you're ready, we invite you to come.



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