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**Transcribed Message
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Message: People Trusting God for the Future

As you look at the title of the message this morning, you might think that this is simply related to our children's ministry building. And the campaign for the children's ministry building was for the future. Take it out of Psalm 145 where we want to pass on from one generation to the next. And when I say that, all the children just get up and leave. You know, we've had four weeks of break in which when I started to teach, nobody left. And now I'm back into facing the reality that when I get up to teach, the whole room nearly empties out. But I've overcome that. But it's not just about the new children's building, in fact, not at all. It certainly is applicable to that. There's an application there.

But back in the fall of 2017, I came across this list that a guy had created in praying for his church. And I just loved the list so much that I thought this is what we could be praying for ourselves here at Covenant. And so, for all these years, we've been working our way through this list of prayers. So, I want to just have us go back just for a moment and look from 2017 to 2024. And it all started with a prayer for Covenant Community Church. There were 10 things that we started to pray. And I know many of you have faithfully prayed these for over these years. The elders pray these regularly. It just walks us through our heart for our church and for our community.

We pray that we would worship God with an undistracted heart, that God would reveal the wonders of his word, that he would deepen our faith and our joy in this glorious gospel, that he would cause us to treasure the bride, the church that Jesus has given himself for, that we would build each other up. You know, it's easy to tear each other down, but here our prayer is just the opposite of that. We want to build each other up. We want to encourage each other and that love would adorn our lives. If that's the case, then we are building each other up, right? We need God's protection from the evil of our world and the ideas that pervade our world and come against us.

We need to have our leadership experience God's guidance in faithfully shepherding the flock. We want to be equipped for the mission that God's called us to. And then our theme from last year was deepen our longing for Christ's return. I don't know about you. I'd love for Jesus to come back today. In fact, I'd love him to come back before we finish. But that's what we need, don't we? We need to live every day in the light of his return. So that began in 2017, and it has continued as an annual theme then every year for what will now be nine years. And so, I just listed out what we did over these past nine years.

It started in 2017 with our need to be people of the book. I mean, we're going to see again this morning. We need to be people of the book. That's what God has called us to be. And that certainly was fitting in with the second of those prayers. And then we need to be people who are in step with the Holy Spirit. People in step with the Spirit. There's not a specific prayer that correlates to that one. I just look at that and I go, that's the umbrella over it all. If we're not walking in step with the Holy Spirit, then none of the other ones are really going to be effective anyway, are they? And then in 2019, we looked at people on a mission. And that related, I think, to number three and to number nine. People in community was what we looked at in 2020. That really related to the prayer of number five and six. People in unity really related to numbers six and seven. People who love the church, obviously that's number four. And then people of praise, that's number one. We want to be people who are undistracted in our worship of God as we come together. And then people who live in the light of His return. Well, that's the one we just did in 24.

So, here's the last of this list as we wrap this up this morning. People trusting God for the future. And for people trusting God for the future, I thought that really relates to that number eight. Because we need to have our leadership walking in step with the Spirit, being men of the word, who are faithfully shepherding the flock. So, let's look forward, 2025 and beyond, and this whole matter of, God, would you guide the leadership of our church in such a way that they're faithfully shepherding the body of Christ?

Now, to do that, here's what I want to do. We have a lot of new people at Covenant, and we haven't spoken to this in many years. So, I think it's appropriate on that level and this level. But let's talk a little bit about a biblical picture of governance. Now you go, oh great, this

is as engaging and exciting as I could ever imagine. A talk on the principles of governance. Well, you know, it may initially strike us that way, but I want to assure you that how a church is governed is of vital importance. And what we do in that regard reveals a lot about us.

Look at the spectrum of church history, and even in the present-day evangelical church, and you see a breadth of different ways that the church functions and governs itself. There are churches that are basically a fully empowered democracy, so that the congregation is called on to vote repeatedly about everything that comes up for discussion and decision. All the way to the other side of that spectrum, you could swing over and have almost like a benevolent dictatorship in which one man, one person rules the church, runs the church, whatever that person wants, that's what happens. And so that's what you see within the context of the church today and in church history. And I simply say to you that the structure of a church and how it is governed says a lot about that church.

I think it should be important to us, and I think we should want to know what God's Word says, because that is a part of it, isn't it? If how we govern ourselves says a lot about us as a church, then what it should say, at least in one respect, is these people are serious about following God's Word, and they want to do exactly what that Word says to the best of their ability and the best of their understanding. And so that's what I would like for us to consider this morning. So, let's start by looking at the leadership of this church and of God's church.

And we ask, first, who they are. Who they are. And the Bible in the New Testament describes them with three different words. The Bible calls them elders, calls them bishops or overseers, and calls them pastors. And those three words are used interchangeably so that what we see is these three words referring to the same office.

When you look at that first word, elder, it's the Greek word *presbuteros*. Well, when you listen to that word *presbuteros*, and in that word you hear another word, don't you? You hear the word Presbyterian. And so Presbyterian churches are known for having elders who give governance and leadership to the church.

The word for bishop or the word overseer is the Greek word *episkopos*. So when you listen to the word *episkopos*, you know what word comes to mind. It's the word Episcopalian. Episcopalian governance is often driven by the model of a bishop. And then, of course, you

have the word for pastor. The word for pastor is the word *poimen*, which simply means shepherd.

And so you have these three words that are used interchangeably. They speak, again, of the same office, they speak of the same responsibility, and we say that based on God's Word. Because in Acts chapter 20, and we're going to turn there a little bit, but in Acts chapter 20, in verse 17, as Paul is gathering the elders of Thessalonians to say goodbye to them, he refers to them as the calling together of the elders. Well, then later in that same passage, he refers to them as overseers. Well, he didn't switch up and bring in another group. It's the exact same group of men. In one instance, he refers to them as elders. And in another group, later, he calls them overseers.

It's often said that the word elders speaks to their character. You see that in 1 Timothy 3 and in Titus 1, and the idea of overseer speaks of their function, what it is that we're going to see that God has called them to do. I think the other reason that we see that is in the same regard. 1 Timothy chapter 3, verse 1, Paul says, if anybody wants to be an overseer, it's a good thing. If a man desires to be an overseer, it's a good thing. Well, in the same book, writing to the same people, in the fifth chapter in verse 17, he then switches and he calls them elders. So, the point is simply this, we have these three words that speak to the leadership that God has directed the church to submit to, and they are elders, they're overseers, bishops, and or pastors.

Here's what I would suggest. If you have an elder in your community group this morning, as we come back together at 11 o'clock, just refer to them this morning as Bishop so-and-so. Just see how that works out, see if they even respond to you.

Now, the second thing regarding who they are, they are men. They're men. Now, obviously, that is totally out of step with our culture. To limit the office of leadership in the church as being for men only is understood in our culture as being totally out of step. But again, we believe that what we do by way of governance and leadership within the local church reflects who we are and reflects our commitment to the Word of God.

And so, we turn to the Word of God and what do we see? We see that God calls on men to step into these positions of leadership. We call this complementarianism.

Complementarianism simply says this, within the plan of God, within the purpose of God, men and women are equal in every respect. They're equally made in the image and likeness of God. There isn't any hierarchy regarding how we reflect that image and how we reflect that likeness and the investment that God gives to both men and women. No difference.

The difference comes when you step into the responsibilities that God has given within the church and the home. And within the church and the home, there are different responsibilities that God has entrusted to men and different responsibilities that God's entrusted to women. That simply is reflective of what we see in the Word. The idea is, of course, supported by what we've already said regarding the admonitions of Scripture in seeking out godly men, 1 Timothy 3, Titus chapter 1. When Paul says that you're looking for someone to step into these positions of leadership, they need to be the husband of one wife. He doesn't say they need to be the wife of one husband, as if it was reciprocal, as if it could go either way.

In 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verses 11 to 15, Paul lays out clear instruction that for our culture is offensive. Let me just say it. It's offensive when he says that women are not allowed to teach men in this kind of an assembly in the local church. And that's offensive to our culture. It's offensive to some within the evangelical church. I always liked what Tim Keller said when he was dealing with 2 Timothy 2:11-15, and it is a challenging passage. But he talked about what he coined as intellectual imperialism. He said, we have a case of intellectual imperialism when we come to 2 Timothy chapter 2. He said, we want to look at that and we say, we don't know what that means. And because I don't know what it means, then you can't know what it means either. And he called that intellectual imperialism. Then he went on to say, we know what it means. We just don't like what it means. And so we believe that God has called men to step into these positions of leadership.

I think the other point of reference that I would make in that regard is there is no reference in the New Testament epistles in which the church gets its instruction for how to conduct itself. There's no examples of women as elders. There's no examples of women as pastors. And you say, well, wait a minute. That's just an argument from silence. Well, it is an argument from silence, but it's kind of a deafening silence because if that were not the case,

certainly God by His Spirit would have given us that insight. So then secondly, that's who they are. They're elders, they're bishops, overseers, they're pastors, they're men.

How many are there? How many are there? In a one-word answer, there's always to be a plurality. There always is to be a plurality. There's always more than one. When Paul writes to local churches, he never writes to one pastor. He writes to a group of pastors. He writes to a group of elders. He writes to a plurality of elders so that we don't have one pastor at Covenant. When I introduce myself or someone asks me what I do, I almost always say I'm one of the pastors of Covenant Community because that's the reality. We're a plurality of elders. We're a plurality of pastors.

When you look at church history, this is both to me fascinating and sad at the same time because already in the early writings of the New Testament, one of the consistent warnings that Paul gives to the local churches that he writes to, a lot of it has to do with concerns about how they function and about how they govern themselves and about their witness and testimony to the world and about people within the church who have a tendency to want to become powerful and centered on themselves. And so when you look at the landscape of church history and you go back even as early as the 1st century, so if Jesus lived and died in, you know, around 30 to 33 AD, you don't even get out of the 1st century before you have men who are claiming a geographic area as being their power locus. They elevate themselves as bishops and elders, and you get to come and ask them what you can do and can't do, even to the point that the church of Rome has elevated one man, given him a title and name, and says he speaks alone for God. My friends, that's just a total and complete misunderstanding and violation of God's Word. He doesn't entrust that responsibility to one. He entrusts that responsibility to a plurality.

So, let's think together of what they do. What they do. That's who they are. What are they to do? There's a lot that we could say here at this point. I'm going to limit my thoughts to four things. But, you know, one of the most common pictures in the Old Testament and New Testament, when it comes to God's relationship with His people, when He wants to characterize or when He wants to name something about Himself, He often, in the Old Testament, refers to Himself as a shepherd. He's the shepherd of His people.

We immediately think of Psalm 23, don't we? The Lord is my shepherd. Or we go to Ezekiel, where it says that God, as the shepherd of His people, will care for them and protect them and feed them. And so that analogy is all through the Old Testament. Well, we would expect it then to carry over into the New Testament. And that's exactly what we see. When you get to the New Testament, the idea, the word, the analogy that God uses oftentimes has to do with this matter of being a shepherd. So, Jesus is not only the bread of life, as we're seeing in John 6, right? But in John 10, when we get to John 10, He is also the good shepherd. And then Peter's going to say in 1 Peter 5, He's not just the good shepherd, He's the chief shepherd. And that's what we always want to keep in mind, isn't it?

So, four things that shepherds, that elders, that overseers, that pastors are called on to do. The first one is they are to protect the church. They're to protect the church. I go to that passage in Acts chapter 20, and I pick up at verse 28. This, remember, again, is where Paul is on his way to Rome. He knows he's not going to see the believers at Ephesus probably ever again. And so, as he's passing through, he gets word and he calls the elders of the churches of Ephesus to come and to meet with him for this one last time. You might remember, they have this very tearful, emotional reunion in saying goodbye to each other. But this is what Paul says to these guys as he meets: be careful, he says. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers or elders. To care for the church of God, which He obtained with His own blood. I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves will arise, men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert. Remember that after three years, I did not cease night and day to admonish everyone with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up.

The whole point is, He's calling on these elders, these overseers to protect the church. And it should not be missed that they are to protect the church from without. We know we live in a fallen, broken world, and we understand that this world is opposed to us just as they were opposed to Jesus. But we surely don't want to miss the fact that the warning is equally important to say we have to guard from within. There's a protective nature to this ministry that God has called us to. So, from within and from without.

This is a consistent theme of the epistles. In Hebrews chapter 13, we'll read that again in just a moment, but in that passage, Paul says, you need as elders to be vigilant. And it's the word for a sentry who's watching, who's foregoing sleep because he's so concerned about the responsibility and mission that he's been given. So, to keep watch.

The second thing elders do is they feed the flock. They feed the flock. I want to go to 2 Timothy chapter 4, and here's this wonderful statement. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing in His kingdom, preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with complete patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching. That's the day that we live in. But having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Now, listen to this statement in Amos chapter 8 and verses 11 and 12. It's a commentary on the day in which Amos lived. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea and from north to east. They shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it. That was a part of God's judgment because the people had so turned away from the word that God says, okay, if that's what you want, that's what I'm going to give to you. So, Paul's admonition to Timothy, Timothy, preach the word. Preach it in season and preach it out of season. Be consistent in bringing the word to the people.

Then, listen to this last statement in Deuteronomy 32 and verse 45. I've loved these words. And when Moses had finished speaking all these words to all of Israel, he said to them, take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life. And by this word, you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. This is the charge that Moses is giving to the parents and to the adults within the nation. These are not empty words. This is the word of God that has been entrusted to us.

This is a part of the responsibility of elders is feeding the church, making sure that everything that we do in this place is focused in, centered on, and consistent with the word of God. It just goes, of course, with this idea of protection as well. There is a wonderful article in the foyer. There's two new ones today. This one is, "Top Reasons Why I Love Verse-by-Verse Exposition". So, grab that one. And then the other one, and I'll probably hide like this next one for many weeks to come. I don't have it in front of me, but the title is something like, "Why You Shouldn't Be Late for Church". It's one of my all-time favorites, of course.

But listen to why this guy says he loves it when we open the word on Sunday morning, and we just go verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, book-by-book. He says this: it highlights that every word is important. It exposes the church to unfamiliar passages. It emphasizes what God emphasizes. It doesn't allow for pet doctrines to rule. It exposes the church to the whole counsel of God. It exposes the church to the hard Bible passages. And then it lists John 6:53. So, I can't wait to hear what somebody's going to speak on next week on John 6:53, because he tells us right here it's a hard one. It doesn't allow the culture to hijack the sermon. It causes you to trust that God gives his people what they need. It takes away the need for creativity. This is how God delivered the Bible. So, what are elders to do? They're to protect the church. What are elders to do? They're to feed the church, make sure the word is centered.

Thirdly, they're to lead the church. That's just inherent in the word overseer. The whole idea of an overseer is one who is leading. It's the responsibility of the elders of Covenant Community Church to always keep the big picture in mind. Now, we have to drill down into the details, but it's the charge that God gives to the elders to keep the big picture in mind. To understand the mission and task that he has called us to in terms of discipleship and evangelism, and then how it works itself out in all the ministries of our church. There are all these different things that we are engaged in and seeking to do to build up the body and to reach our community. It's the job of the elders to keep that big picture in mind and to make sure that we're not experiencing any kind of drift from the mission that God has given us to. So, elders, overseers, they lead from the front. They don't lead from the back. They don't lead from the middle. They lead from the front. So, I'm going to ask the elders in the weeks to come to sit

on these front rows to lead. No, I'm not. But to lead from the... To lead, right? To govern in that way.

Then the last one, care for the church. Care for the church. Provide, nurture, encouragement. 1 Thessalonians 2 calls it as being a father. Overseeing and caring for and providing for. Chapter 5, he says, encourage the faint-hearted. Help those who are weak. Be patient with all. So, that's an important part. It includes being caring enough to confront. Galatians chapter 6, Matthew chapter 18. We don't just turn an eye away from what we see as behavior and attitudes and things that need to be spoken to and addressed. Here's our prayer for 2025. Our prayer for 2025 is God, guide our leadership to be faithfully shepherding the flock of Covenant Community Church and doing it in a way that honors you and pleases you and brings glory to you.

So, now I want to shift from governance, and I want to look at a biblical picture of succession and speak to this just in a couple of ways. One thing is clear as you read your Bible. There is succession. Succession always happens. And so, you have examples of it. Moses passing the baton to Joshua. You have Elijah passing the baton to Elisha. You have Saul supposed to pass it to David, but that one didn't go anywhere near the way God had intended it. But then David to Solomon would be a picture of that. Paul to Timothy. You could add Titus to that because Paul mentored those young men.

One thing I didn't list was a passage back in Numbers. And in Numbers 8:23 to 26. And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, this applies to the Levites from 25 years old and upward. They shall come to do the duty in the service of the tent of meeting. And from the age of 50 years, they shall withdraw from the duty of the service and serve no more. They minister to their brothers in the tent of meeting by keeping guard, but they shall do no service. Thus, you shall do to the Levites assigning their duties. So here you have within the ministry of the Levites a very defined beginning and a very defined end from 25 to 50. Then they don't retire, but they just step into another role.

As I was reading that and thinking about that this week, I thought, man, I've got to get on the ball. 50 is coming very fast. It's coming very soon. This is going to be on me before I know it. And then I realized I'm in gross violation. So that's the reality, right? Succession

happens. It happens everywhere. It happens all the time. It's just a part of life. But what isn't as clear is the when and the how. But it's coming. And we need to prepare, we need to plan, and we need to think so that we can ensure that the vision and the ministry of Covenant stays exactly on course the way God would want it to, so that we can have the stability that God would want for there to be at this church.

Now, I have no immediate plan to step away from my role as teaching elder, but it's coming. And this is why, with this in mind this morning, I wanted to speak to this, because a lack of preparation and a lack of thought on the part of the elders and a part of the body is simply not acceptable. Preparation and planning, or a lack thereof, have far-reaching consequences. And so we don't want that. We want to begin to think and we want to begin to pray and we want to have some clarity regarding what that looks like for the health and vitality of our church. There is another man somewhere, and I hope maybe this morning he's preaching and teaching in a church somewhere, but there's another man that God has that he's going to bring to Covenant at some point, and he is going to step into this role, because succession happens. And we just need to think about that. We need to engage that. Some of us might be celebrating that thought, others maybe not as much. But here is the point. We're going to work hard as elders to walk through this in a way that we hope honors God.

And so I just jotted down a few things. We're going to walk with God and keep him the focus, because that's what we want. This is his church. This is his body. And let's make sure that we're following him and we're following his leading. We're talking about him. We're trusting in him, because he's the center and focus of it all. We all know that wonderful promise in Jeremiah 29, for I know the plans I have for you, plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Now obviously that was said to God's people in the midst of their being in exile, but its application is to ourselves today as well. God has a plan, and we can trust him at that plan.

Second, we're going to be on guard, just as we talked about. We're going to be on guard, and we're going to follow the admonition of Acts 20. We're going to be attentive to walk in truth, to walk in the truth of Ephesians 4. We're going to strive together to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace, because the enemy loves to sow discord, and the

enemy loves to sow disunity, and the enemy loves to thrive off misinformation, and we don't want any of that. So, we're going to do our best to be on guard.

We're going to thirdly, stay committed to our mission. We're going to stay committed to our mission, to know God, love others, and live out the gospel. That is our heartbeat. That's our desire. The word is going to keep us centered, and the word is going to keep us anchored, and the word is going to keep us focused on that truth.

Then we're going to pray earnestly. We're going to pray earnestly. There's no substitute for prayer. In Acts chapter 12, verse 5, remember when Peter was in prison, Luke records for us, the earnest prayer was made to God by the church. I think that should be us. Earnest prayer was made by the church to God. Planning is important, but prayer is the means that God uses to bring His blessing. I love to rest in the truth that our God is sovereign, and that He has good things, He has great things in store for Covenant Community Church.

So, what do we take away? Our God is absolutely trustworthy. We've seen it in our past. We've rehearsed this a little bit this morning. We're living it in the present. We get to experience it in the present as well, and we are trusting God alone for the future. You know, at the end, it's all tied back into this glorious gospel, isn't it? The fact that we are in the body of Christ, the fact that we can sit here this morning and think of God as our Father, think of those we're gathered with as our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is the unity, not of an organization or some structure that we have come up with. It's a living organism called the church of Jesus Christ, and we get to be a part of that simply by faith and trust in what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

Our heart's desire, our mission, our hope is that everyone here this morning has stepped into that wonderful truth. You can know right now, sitting where you are, that your sins are forgiven, and you can know that God has promised you eternal life with Him forever. If you're not certain about that, then we want you to be, because that's exactly what God wants for you. These things are written. John said, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing have life in His name. We would present to you this glorious truth this morning.

If you've never put your faith and trust in Jesus as your Savior, I would encourage you to do that. Consider that this morning as the next step that you would take in your spiritual journey, and God will honor His promise. He will forgive your sin. He will lift any condemnation that you feel under, and He will give you the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we are so very thankful for this body of Christ called Covenant. We're thankful, Father, for your faithfulness that we see all over the place. We're thankful for these people who love you so much, who love each other, who love the community that you've put us in, who seek to serve you and honor you every day in all that they do and say. So, we continue to ask for your great blessing. We continue to ask for the outpouring of your Holy Spirit. We continue to ask that your Word will be the anchor beneath our feet, Father, that you will be the one who leads us and guides us, and when that all is transpiring, then we get to lift up your name. We get to honor you. We get to point everyone to you and say these are the great things that God is doing for us. We are grateful for that. In Jesus' name, amen.