

Building Your Life Around the Presence of God

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Part 2

Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

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I want to ask us to pray this morning for Jess Arnds and his family. Many of you saw the prayer request. If you didn't and you'd like to receive the prayer request, you can always let us know that. We don't send them to you unless you ask us for them, trying to be respectful of, you know, email overload and all of that. But you just send a note to admin@providenceduluth.org and ask us to be included in the prayer list and update list, whatever, and we'll be happy to do that. But we shared this week very sad news that Jess's brother, 19 year old brother Josh passed away this week. You may remember that Josh has had some health issues, serious health issues in the last couple of years, really bad shoulder injury that resulted in some strange swelling, in treating that, in dealing with that he temporarily had kidney failure, so he had some real serious issues. So he's been struggling with a lot of pain and a lot of difficulty and apparently there was an overdose but it wasn't, it apparently was not intentional at all, just some kind of maybe just a combination of all of his problems and the medications. Anyway, but it was a sudden loss. So Jess's younger brother Josh, as I said, 19, passed away. His mom and dad need to be in our prayers and certainly Jess and Melissa and the kids and Jess's other brother as well. So we're going to pray for them and just ask the Lord to minister comfort to them. I know, I communicated with Jess just a couple of days ago and he said they're shedding a lot of tears but that they're also praising the Lord and trusting in him. So we praise God for their faith that loves the Lord.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we come to You this morning, Lord, praising You because You are holy and You are good, and to be in Your presence is to experience fullness of joy, and we come into Your presence this morning to seek You, but even as we come, we want to lift up to You the Arnds family in this time of loss. We pray for Jess and Melissa, for their kids, for mom and dad. Lord, we pray for just the sense of loss that they feel, the pain, and, Father, we thank You for just the promise of Your presence and that You're working in all circumstances. Even when we experience sudden and painful loss, we know that You are sovereign over the days of a man's life, that they're numbered before there's one of them, and that You are truly working all things together for good to those who love You, so that we can count it all joy when we encounter fiery trials. But we just ask for faith for

our brother and sister, their family. Pour out Your grace upon them. We thank You for the great blessing they have been to us and continue to be Your church, churches, Jess and his dad and their ministries, continue to bless them. Make this time of sorrow a time of great comfort and strength in the presence of Christ and may You make them all, Lord, just more joyful in who You are and Your goodness even as they experience the pain of separation. We pray that You would now bless us as we go to Your word and we study it. We pray that our hearts would be drawn to love our Savior more and we pray this in His name. Amen.

So this morning, we're looking again at Nehemiah 12 and we're continuing a message that we began last Sunday. So it's a two-part message, the title of the message is "Building Your Life Around the Presence of God." Building your life around the presence of God. You know, the reality is every human being was made for God so you were made for God. You were made to know him and to worship him. You were made to live in his presence. You were made to see his glory and reflect back to him the radiance of his worth in heartfelt worship and adoration. This is what the human soul was created for. This is where we find our true sense of identity and meaning.

We're to live in the presence of God, before the face of God. That's the way the Bible actually speaks of the presence of God. When you read the phrase "presence of God" in the Old Testament, the Hebrew says literally "before the face of God," and it'll translate as "in the presence of God." But before his face. There's a wonderful verse in Exodus 33, he says the Lord used to speak to Moses, think about this, the Lord used to speak to Moses face-to-face as a man speaks with his friend. That's what it was for Moses when he went in the tabernacle. God spoke to him face-to-face as a man speaks with his friend. We were made to live before God face-to-face and one day we will see him as he is and there will be no more sin blocking our understanding of who he is and we will see him face-to-face.

But you were made to live this way on a daily basis. Though we live in a fallen world, though we ourselves have not been fully redeemed, if you're born again your heart has been made new and yet you still live in a body that is affected in a radical way by sin, and so that our experience of God's presence is blurred, it is hindered, but it doesn't change the fact that we were made to live in his presence and Nehemiah 12, this text which speaks to us about the rededication of the walls of Jerusalem in 445 BC, is basically a text given to the people of God then at that time and to us today to show us that we are to build our lives around the presence of God.

Just to summarize the background again, Nehemiah 12, as I mentioned, is 445 BC. The newly reconstituted nation of Judah, or really it's not a nation, it's a province, but the people of Israel have returned from the Babylonian captivity, they have returned to the land of Israel and to the city of Jerusalem. They have begun to rebuild the ruins, they rebuilt the temple, the place of worship. They restored the law to its rightful place. They have rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. They've repopulated the city of Jerusalem and now this passage tells us about the rededication of the walls of Jerusalem and what we said last Sunday is that this passage is telling us how to live for God around the presence of

God in very difficult circumstances because the people that this text describes and the people to whom this text was written, those who immediately followed after this generation, were living under oppression. They were living under Persian hegemony, Persian rule. They dealt with oppression and injustice.

We see as we read through the books of Ezra/Nehemiah, they faced continual cultural hostility. They lived in the face of direct opposition to all that they wanted to do for God, intense spiritual opposition. Their outward circumstances were discouraging. They had hoped they would recover some of the glory of the days past, the glory days of Israel under David and Solomon when Israel had been a mighty nation. The people of God blessed as the apple of his eye, obvious to all the surrounding nations, "Look at the beauty of Israel." But God's purpose is not to restore them to that external physical type of blessing. They will never again be like they were under David and Solomon in the earthly realm, and so they're having to deal with the fact that things are not going to be like they were, life is not going to be like we want it to be. We're still going to live under oppression in the midst of injustice, in the face of hostility and opposition. This is our lot. This is where we have to, when we get up in the morning this is what we have to be about. That's what they were finding out.

How do you live in that kind of circumstance? This passage and the book Ezra/Nehemiah, those two books in our Bible, one book in the Hebrew Bible, Ezra/Nehemiah, this book is basically answering that question, how should you live in the midst of this kind of difficult life circumstance, and the message really is to build your life around the presence of God, to make everything centered around knowing and loving God. That's what life is for and if you do that, you will be what God wants you to be and you will make an impact as God wants you to make in your day to those around you. God will be glorified and you will be filled with joy and you will know the Lord's presence.

So building our lives around the presence of God, that's the focus of this entire passage. We see it because they're being told to build their lives around the city of God, Jerusalem. It's all about them repopulating the land but making Jerusalem the center of their focus in the weekly calendar, monthly calendar, yearly calendar. It's all about going to Jerusalem to worship God at the temple and the application of this for us, the church, in the church age since Jesus has come and has given us the Holy Spirit and has accomplished our salvation, how does this apply to us? We saw that Jerusalem and the temple are types of the church in the New Testament. We shared those verses last week. I encourage you to look at that to get the background if you weren't with us. But the church is the temple of God. The church is the city of God. And so if we're to build our lives around the presence of God, they were told to build their lives around the presence of God by building their lives around the city of God and the temple of God. Well, for you and me to build our lives around the presence of God means to build our lives around the city of God and the temple of God which means to build our lives around the church, the people of God. That's got to be the focus. We cannot experience the presence of God as a life-captivating reality without building our lives around the people of God. You've got to build your life around the church. We talked about that last week. You have to build your life centered

around the church. The church needs to be at the center of your life. It's more important than family and it's more important than work. Our vocation is important, our family is important, absolutely, but all of those things are to be brought up into the presence of God and the way you do that is by keeping the people of God central in your life.

So last week, we looked at the first point which is the centrality of the church. To build your life around the people of God, you need to understand the centrality of the church. This morning, we're taking the next step at what this passage unpacks for us, to build your life around the presence of God you have to also understand the necessity of godly leadership. You build your life around the presence of God by building your life around the people of God, but the people of God need to be led by godly leaders. This is one of the key emphases of this passage. This 12th chapter, the first 26 verses lead up to the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem, and as I mentioned last time, it's like he gives us all this information about all these different people, why? I mean, really, honestly, reading today in 2021, these names are just challenging. I mean, I find them challenging every time and I've read them a lot. It's just that there's distance because we don't recognize the names Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, Shecaniah but the Lord put them in his word for a reason. And so we read them and the reason that we see he put them here is he's basically making this point, listen, to the people of Judah in that day that are now living in 445 BC, to build their lives around the city of Jerusalem and the temple, to build their lives around the presence of God, they must have the key leaders in place. They must have priests and Levites who are qualified and faithful. That's the thrust of the first 26 verses in particular but really it's even woven in the last half of the chapter as well. He takes time to tell us about all these priests and Levites because he's saying, "Listen, guys, the priests and Levites are qualified. They were qualified. We didn't have unqualified leaders." And these leaders were faithful to the Scripture.

So then if we're going to build our lives around the presence of God, what this basically is telling us we need to build our lives around the church, we need to make the church a key priority. I mentioned last week, when you move somewhere you should think about the distance to a sound faithful church. That should be one of the top priorities if you're going to think like God wants you to think. But then how do you define what is a faithful church? Well, a faithful church according to the Old Testament, this passage, and the New Testament, we're going to see, is one that has qualified leaders who are faithful to the Scriptures and that's the purpose of these verses, all of these lists of priests and Levites.

I'm going to tell you what he does before we read the text. Essentially, what he's going to do, he's going to basically say, "Listen, I'm going to tell you about the priests," let me say priests and Levites first, let me explain that for a moment. The priests were the people that God set apart to minister in the temple proper, that is, the building or originally the tabernacle. Remember it was a tent of meeting, then it became a permanent temple. Solomon built the temple but Moses and the people coming out of Egypt built the tabernacle, the tent of meeting. So the priests were the only ones that could minister inside the tent of meeting or the temple, inside the building proper. They're the only ones that could offer sacrifices. They were the only ones that could burn the incense. They

were the only ones, the high priest had to come from that priestly line that was the only one that could go behind the veil once a year on the Day of Atonement. But the Levites were the only people in Israel who were qualified to do all of the practical stuff around the worship of God.

It's interesting, the Levites, remember Levi, he was one of the 12 sons of Jacob, so one of the 12 tribes of Israel, the original 12 tribes of Israel, but Levi belongs to the Lord. God took Levi to himself and said, "The inheritance of the Levites, they don't get any inheritance in the land. I am their inheritance and they belong to Me." And they alone are the ones that can stay close to the tabernacle, they camp around the tabernacle when the tabernacle would be moving from place to place. The Levites camped around it. The Levites carried it. A regular Jew could not carry it. It would be death. God said only Levites can do these things, "Only Levites can do My singing. Only Levites can pack things up and move things. They're the ones that set things up. Only Levites. Only the tribe of Levi." And then a subset of the tribe of Levi was the line of Aaron. Aaron and Moses were both Levites. They were descendants of Levi and God chose Aaron and his family to be the line of the priests. Only the line of Aaron. So it was a subset of the Levites, you see?

So the priests and the Levites, God said, "This is the way it is." What we see in the Bible is God tells you how to worship him. You don't tell him how you want to worship him. I mean, you can tell him but he's not taking suggestions so it would probably be better not to tell him, just listen. So the priests and the Levites, and so that's under the old covenant, those were the two leadership offices and they were the ones that facilitated. Think about this, they're the ones that facilitate the people meeting God. Do you see that? The people have to come to the tabernacle, offer a sacrifice. To do that, there are Levites and priests that have to be working to enable them to actually come into the presence of God. And so under the old covenant, now a rebuilt temple, rebuilt walls of Jerusalem, people living around the people of God, I mean the people of God living with the presence of God, the city of God, the temple of God at the center of their lives, they must have qualified leaders. They must have qualified priests and qualified Levites otherwise they can't live in the presence of God.

So this passage is going to show that under three different high priests, and it's hard to figure this out as you're going along but I want to tell you that verses 1 to 9 are going to tell you about the priests and the Levites at the time of Jeshua and Zerubbabel. That was the first return in 538 BC. When they get there and they're in the land and they're rebuilding the temple, Jeshua was the high priest and here are the priests and Levites verses 1 to 9. Verses 10 and 11 are going to give you a list of high priests, six different men who are the high priests in order. Then verses 12 to 26 are going to give you again the priests and Levites and some other information but the priests and Levites primarily under the next high priest. Jeshua was the high priest when they got back to the land, the next guy is Joiakim and verses 12 to 26 talk about the priests and Levites under Joiakim. So it's another generation and the idea is the first generation when they got back and they rebuilt the temple, they had qualified priests and Levites. Then after they died and the next generation, Joiakim is the high priest. Do you know what they had? They had

qualified priests and qualified Levites. And the next generation, verses 27, actually the end of verse 26 gets into this, Eliashib is the high priest at the time of Nehemiah, the book, the writing of this, the events of this chapter. Eliashib is the son of Joiakim who is the son of Jeshua. So it's third generation and basically the message here is we've already seen these guys, they're qualified priests and qualified Levites.

So all three generations, qualified priests, qualified Levites, therefore we know that we can meet God because we have qualified leaders. That's what it was under the old covenant. It's changed under the new covenant in the sense that we're all priests, in one sense, right? We go directly to God through Jesus Christ. We don't need a priest, you don't need a priest to introduce you to God, the priest is Jesus. He's the high priest and you now are made a priest as a follower of God, and yet it's interesting in the New Testament, though, that though there's a sense in which we all equally have access to God, he still ordains the office of leadership, two offices, elder and deacon. And I think that's instructive for us and as we think about building your life around the church of God, you have to look at the men in leadership. That's one of the signs of a faithful church. That's what we're going to see this morning.

So Nehemiah 12.

1 Now these are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua [and here's the list]: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, 2 Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, 3 Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, 4 Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah, 5 Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, 6 Shemaiah and Joiarib, Jedaiah, 7 Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah and Jedaiah.

Now let me say something about that for a moment. For us, that sounds really difficult, doesn't it? Those names, I don't think we have maybe a couple of names that you might...we name our kids biblical names but these don't seem to be very many of those that we choose. Jeremiah was one. But for the people, the original audience, they heard that differently than you and I hear it. They heard it and they recognized them. They knew, though this is two generations back, this would be like saying, not the best illustration but something like saying, you know, Billy Sunday, D. L. Moody, names of, you know, men of God in the past. J. Gresham Machen, Charles Spurgeon. You see, you know the names, that would have had some of that kind of ring to it for them, okay? Now let's pick it back up in verse 8.

8 The Levites were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah who was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving, he and his brothers. 9 Also Bakbukiah and Unni, their brothers, stood opposite them in their service divisions.

So they hear all these names of faithful men that they've heard about, many of them, they've heard of these guys. Then in verses 10 and 11, here come the list of high priests.

10 Jeshua became the father of Joiakim [Jeshua the high priest became the father of Joiakim the high priest], and Joiakim became the father of Eliashib, and Eliashib became the father of Joiada, 11 and Joiada became the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan became the father of Jaddua. 12 Now in the days of Joiakim [that's the second high priest in the list], the priests, the heads of fathers' households were [now look at this]: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah;

Now what you have is he's connecting this list directly to the previous list. Look with me, hold your finger at verse 12 and look back at verse 1, the end of verse 1. You see the beginning of the list, "Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra." Now down in verse 12, "of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; of Ezra, Meshullam." You see, he's taking you back and saying, "This is the guy who was the son of this guy. This was the son of this guy." And he's connecting it. He's showing the Lord is working, this continuity, this line of faithful godly men is continuing. Verse 13,

13 ... of Amariah, Jehohanan; 14 of Malluchi, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; 15 of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; 16 of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; 17 of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai; 18 of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; 19 of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; 20 of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; 21 of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel. 22 As for the Levites, the heads of fathers' households were registered in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan and Jaddua;

Basically he's saying here, "We wrote down the list. We kept up with the appropriate list. We made sure that the people that were ministering as priests were qualified. In the "Book of Chronicles," this isn't the biblical book of Chronicles, this is a book they were keeping to keep that kind of list.

...in the Book of the Chronicles up to the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib. 24 The heads of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers opposite them, to praise and give thanks, as prescribed by David the man of God, division corresponding to division. 25 Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon and Akkub were gatekeepers keeping watch at the storehouses of the gates. 26 These served in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the priest and scribe.

He's basically saying, "These are the ones that served from the time we got back all the way to the time now, the days of Ezra the priest and scribe, and Nehemiah the governor."

So what I want us to do now, I want to consider our thoughts about this, what qualified leaders, I mean this idea of godly leaders, what is this text telling us? I think there are two things that this text is really telling us, a test of leadership to know that if the church is led

by the appropriate kind of leadership so that we can build our lives around a church, the people of God that are really pursuing God, there are two issues. First, there must be qualified leaders. The first point: qualified leaders. And the second point we'll see is going to be faithful leaders, but the first point: qualified leaders. These three lists that we read were all about proving their qualifications. In the old covenant, God ordained that it had to be through the direct lineage of those he had chosen to himself, and so qualified leader meant the birthright to leadership. It was a typological thing. It's not that way now. You're not qualified by being the son of someone who's qualified. That's not an issue nowadays on this side of the cross, but in that time it was and the emphasis, then, is qualified leaders.

I'll just mention a few passages that you can look at that will show you that the priests were to come from Aaron's line as in Exodus 28:1-3, that the Levites were the only people that could serve in the temple. You could look at Numbers 1:47-54; Numbers 3:5-10. That the priests, the line of Aaron were the only ones that could serve as priests is powerfully demonstrated in Numbers 16 with Korah's rebellion. Do you remember that? That's among the Levites now. Among the Levites, they're the people set apart to God. In Numbers 16, Korah and some people with him basically come up to Aaron and Moses and say, "Who made you guys in charge? Why are you? We're Levites too." And so they really, they give it to Moses and Moses realizes, "You don't understand, you're not arguing with us, you're arguing with God." He falls on his face, pleads with the Lord for them but they continue in their rebellion and the next day the Lord tells Moses, "Tell everyone to get back away from Korah and his associates, back away from their tents. Get away from them." And the ground swallows up Korah and his associates and their families, and they are buried alive, go straight into Sheol because they questioned the way God set this up.

Now it's very serious about how he sets up his worship. It's something that's really clear in the Scriptures. So you can look at those passages and you can see that. For us, the issue in the New Testament, how does this translate into our everyday lives? Well, the New Testament makes it clear that leaders are essential. Turn with me to 1 Timothy 3. This passage written by the Apostle Paul to a young pastor, Timothy, who Paul has left in Ephesus to shepherd the church. He's writing to show him how to carry out his duty of pastoring the church and the third chapter basically is about the importance of leadership in the church. If you're going to lead the church the way it needs to be led, if you're going to help the people of God be the temple of God, if you're going to help the people of God experience God's presence and share God's presence with unbelievers and take the message, if that's going to happen you have to have qualified leaders. That's the purpose of the third chapter in 1 Timothy 3.

Look with me, verses 1 to 7. I'll read those and then we'll talk about the rest. Verse 1 of 1 Timothy 3, "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach." Now let me say something about this. The word "overseer" is basically in the New Testament when you read it carefully, you see overseer and elder are interchangeable terms because in Titus 1:5-9, Titus, another young pastor, is told how he needs to lead the church and Paul says

in Titus 1:5, "You need to make sure you appoint elders in every town." And he gives the qualifications and they sound remarkably, virtually identical to these. He's talking about elders and overseers are the same office. So elder equals overseer and then you have deacon and we'll see that in a moment. So then, "An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."

What we see here is that list is almost entirely character. There's only one skill mentioned and that is "able to teach." Everything else is character: above reproach, a one-woman man is what "husband of one wife" means, he speaks of purity, moral purity, he's above reproach, he's a one-woman man, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not a striker, a fighter, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money, managing his own household well, not a new convert, a good reputation with those outside. These are the men that God has set apart for elder. He says, "If you're going to put overseer/elders in place, they must be men like this." Character matters. Character is the one thing that matters.

Look at what he says about deacons, verse 8, "Deacons," the second office in the church is the office of deacon, "Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women must likewise," we believe that's probably wives, it's interchangeable in Greek, the Greek word could be translated "women" or "wives." We believe it's wives, wives of deacons, "must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things." Then back to deacons. "Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."

So Paul says how do you recognize deacons, how do you recognize overseer/elders? It's character. Then he says the importance of it is seeing when you look at it in context, he finishes the list in verse 13 of the qualifications for these two offices and he says in verse 14, "I am writing these things to you," this is Paul talking to Timothy, "I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." I'm going to be coming soon but I'm writing so that you'll know how to set the affairs of the church in order so that the church will be effective in its mission to be the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. The place where the living God is present, the place where God's truth is made known, if that's going to happen, you need to make sure you have godly

leadership in place. It's instructive that's the purpose of the whole book, I think. He's written the whole book of 1 Timothy, this letter Paul's written to show him how to lead the church, how to make the church what it needs to be and he talks about a lot of important things in the book, but it's interesting that he brings the purpose up right after he talks about elders and deacons. As he's talking to elders and deacons, it underscores for him the importance of how that relates to the fulfillment of the mission because he could have put this at the beginning. Normally you'd put it at the beginning, "Hey, I'm writing to you because I may be delayed and I want you to know how to conduct the affairs of the church, and so I'm going to tell you, first of all," in chapter 1 he talks about the danger of false teaching, chapter 2 he talks about the call to prayer and order in worship, in chapter 3 he talks about leadership. Why did he put the purpose statement after leadership? I think because it shows, it underscores and highlights how important leaders are and resonates with what we've seen in Nehemiah 12.

You find out, I mentioned a list similar to this in Titus 1:5-9 where Titus is told to appoint elders that look like this. In Acts 6:1-7, we're told what the qualifications for deacons are as well, another list. Men full of the Holy Spirit who are able to administer the situation that had arisen in Acts 6, there was conflict because in the early church, the Spirit of God moving, the people of God experiencing incredible power and grace, they're just growing, the church is growing, people are being saved, and yet a dispute breaks out in Acts 6 where some of the people who were in need feel like they're being overlooked. He's talking about widows who don't have means of support, the Greek widows felt like they were being overlooked in favor of the Hebrew widows, basically the Greek speaking widows versus the Aramaic speaking widows. The Greek speaking folks from outside of Israel that have come for Pentecost that are now been caught up and stayed there in this tremendous time of revival; it's like they went for a week and they stayed for months because God is on the move. And so there's this extra need for provision. People came and they brought enough money for two weeks and now they're staying for months because they don't want to miss out on what God is doing. They want to be instructed by the apostles so they can take that message back, and so there's a need for money.

Anyway, so the provision, there's this sense that, "Hey, it's not being fairly done," and there was apparently some legitimacy to the concern because the apostles say, "Choose for yourselves six men to carry out this work," and I think that's the birthplace of the deacon ministry where they say, "It's not advisable for us to neglect the word of God and prayer to wait on tables." These practical needs are important to God, in fact, he's going to give a whole office to it, and seven men are chosen, godly men to administer the office, and then because of that the word of God continues to go forth. Verse 7, the word of God continues to spread rapidly after they take care of this practical thing. God cares about the practical stuff.

So you have two offices in the church: elder/overseer/shepherd. You could write that elder equals overseer equals shepherd. That's an equation that will help you understand when you're reading the New Testament, the office, and I would commend to you Acts 20:28 and following, actually read verse 17 and you'll see that Paul's talking to the elders, they're identified as elders, and he says, "God has made you overseers of the church."

Hey, we're elders. We're not overseers. "No, you are an overseer and an elder and God made you overseers to do, what? To shepherd the church of God." So elder equals overseer equals shepherd. Shepherd is spiritual feeding of the flock, protecting the flock, tending to the spiritual needs of the flock. So the office of elder "shepherding or shepherd" is the verb there. Elders shepherd. The office of deacon, the verb there is "serve." Deacons serve.

So the shepherds, the elders are shepherds, the deacons are servants but all of us are called to shepherd one another and all of us are called to serve one another, so in reality what these two offices are is God puts them there to give us people to follow because we're all called to be better shepherds of one another and we're all called to better serve one another, and who is the ultimate shepherd and the ultimate servant but Jesus, the servant of the Lord, the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. So the offices of leadership basically God sets apart, he's ordained the church and this is how the church functions best, to have men who are shepherding who are saying, "Come follow me and learn shepherding as I follow the Great Shepherd. Follow me as I follow Jesus." And servants who are saying, "Come and learn to serve as I'm trying to learn to serve by following the Great Servant Jesus. Follow me as I follow Christ." That's what both offices are saying and God has ordained that this is the way that the church will be healthy.

So if you want to build your life around the presence of God, you want to build your life around a church that has people who are qualified, by character according to what the Scripture says, and who are fulfilling this role of shepherding and serving. Tremendous importance of these two offices we see anticipated in our passage. Leaders must be qualified. Character. So elders and deacons aren't chosen to be elders or deacons because they're successful in business. They're not to be chosen because they're popular, well-liked. I mean, they should be reasonably well-liked but it's not a popularity contest. And the church is called to in your role in nominating or voting on officers, you're to evaluate them the same way, you're to look at the character list. Do these men seem to be out in front leading in serving, leading in shepherding? Do they look like Jesus? That's what those lists basically are. It's Christ-likeness.

Being qualified leaders, but the second thing is you need faithful leaders. Back to our passage in Nehemiah 12. The leaders aren't just duly qualified, they are diligently faithful. You see this in a couple of ways through the passage. An interesting, it's really striking when you think about it, the phrase "David the man of God" is used twice in the passage. Look with me at verse 24. This is telling us that, again this is the part telling about the time under Joiakim and that the priests and Levites were in order, and he says, "The heads of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah," verse 24, "Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers opposite them, to praise and give thanks, as prescribed by David the man of God, division corresponding to division." He's basically saying, "Listen, we had it set up the way David the man of God said. We have the priests set up where they're singing antiphonally." Apparently one group singing and the other group responding in some kind of, you know, two choir situation where they're praising God the way David set it up.

Now what's interesting is, it says "David," not "David the king" but "David the man of God. In fact, the phrase is repeated in verse 36 where you see, "and his kinsmen, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God." So the musical instruments that David the man of God prescribed. The organization that David the man of God prescribed. Not David the king, David the man of God. David was the king but why does it say, "David the man of God"? Because the phrase "the man of God" is a technical formula in the Old Testament and the New Testament actually. The phrase in the New American Standard Bible "man of God" occurs 78 times in the Bible. The first time is Deuteronomy 33:1 when it speaks of "Moses the man of God" and it is a formula for the man who speaks for God. In fact, it's used 15 times in one chapter, 1 Kings 13. It's used a lot in Kings of Elijah, Elisha. Elijah the man of God. Elisha the man of God. And in chapter 13, a man, we don't even know his name, he's just called "the man of God from Judah." Now who is the man of God? The man of God is the man who speaks for God. It's basically a technical term for prophet and a prophet from God.

So think about this. It was prescribed not by David the king but by David the man of God. David is the king but he wants you to think about at this point he was the man of God, he was the prophet. When he prescribed things that the choir was supposed to act this way and set up this way, or we are to use these instruments, he was speaking as the man of God. In other words, God's the one who said, "This choir here. This choir there." God's the one who said, "These instruments, not those." Do you see that? It's God speaking through David. That's why the author of this book says, "David the man of God," and you see in that their commitment that they are doing it, the New American Standard says, "as prescribed by David the man of God," literally in the Hebrew it says, "in accordance with the commandment of David the man of God." David speaking for God gave a commandment and we are obeying that commandment. The Levites were obeying that commandment.

It's also seen in verses 44 and 45 in a couple of other phrases. "On that day," verse 44, "men were also appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contributions, the first fruits and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions required by the law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who served." They had joy in the priests and Levites who served. You see, it's the right men leading the church produces joy for the people. But what I brought that up for, "required by the law." They were doing it exactly as the law said. Verse 45, "For they performed the worship of their God and the service of purification, together with the singers and the gatekeepers," look at that phrase, "in accordance with the command of David and of his son Solomon." They weren't making things up on their own. They were doing what was prescribed by God.

So how do you know good leaders? Well, they have godly character and they are people who prioritize listening to God, not making it up on their own. That emphasis is so critically important and it is so powerfully, so powerfully made on the pages of Scripture when you're carefully reading your Bible. I find it astounding that this isn't emphasized so

much more in seminary training, that this is the regulative principle of worship is the concept. God regulates his worship. God determines how he is to be worshiped. It's not up to us. This is so, I mean, the emphasis is astounding when you look at it carefully. I'm going to show you a little bit of it and just as you read your Bible from now on, just start looking for it and you'll see it everywhere. But we don't make up the way we approach God, he makes it up.

Turn with me to Exodus for a minute, chapter 25. After the exodus, after the giving of the 10 Commandments, God prescribes how they are to approach him in worship. He's going to tell them in these next chapters from chapter 25 to chapter 39, he's going to tell them exactly how they are to build the tabernacle and exactly who's to be priests and exactly how they're to go about clothing the priests, anointing the priests and everything. Then in Leviticus he's going to give specific instructions about exactly how the offerings are to be done. But just 25 it's the tabernacle. He's making a place where God can meet man. How does a sinner come to a holy God? Not the way a sinner thinks or feels but the way God sets forth. That's clearly what we're seeing in this passage.

In chapter 25, he begins and if you have headings in your Bible, often you'll find a heading like above verse 10 I have "Ark of the Covenant." In chapter 25, verse 10, it says, "They shall construct an ark of acacia wood two and a half cubits long, and one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high. You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it, and you shall make a gold molding around it. You shall cast four gold rings for it and fasten them on its four feet, and two rings shall be on one side of it and two rings on the other side of it." Well, what happens is he talks about the ark of the covenant here, then in verses 23 and following, the table of showbread, there was going to be another thing placed in the tabernacle or the temple. Then the golden lampstand that would be in the tabernacle/temple. Then the curtains of linen. Then the boards and sockets, the veil and screen. Chapter 27, the bronze altar, the court of the tabernacle, 27. The garments of the priests, chapter 28. And he gives great detail and specificity to all of these things. I mean, it's 2 ½ cubits, that's what we just read. It's exactly how long, how wide, how high, exactly how many rings you're to put on it, exactly what you're to do with it. And what's interesting is you have from 25 to 30 you have this detailed list, and if you're reading through your Bible, you know you've encountered this because you've had trouble keeping interest as you read this. I mean, you know, okay, 2 ½ cubits, 2 ½ cubits, and you're reading all the detail, all the detail, all the detail, all the detail and you're tempted to skip over it and sometimes you may have done that. You know, it's like reading a genealogy, sometimes it's easy to skip over that, isn't it?

But the question is don't skip over it conceptually and it's better to read it all anyway, but think about why it's there. Why this precision? And what's astounding is it gives this precision in chapters 25 to 30 about every single thing and then in chapters 36 to 39 of Exodus, he then tells you about them making it with almost exactly the same detail. Now think about this, in chapter 25, verse 10, he says, look at this, 25:10, "They shall construct an ark of acacia wood two and a half cubits long, and one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high. You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out." Turn to

chapter 37, verse 1, "Now Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood; its length was two and a half cubits, and its width one and a half cubits, and its height one and a half cubits; and he overlaid it with pure gold inside and out, and made a gold molding for it all around. He cast four rings of gold for it on its four feet; even two rings on one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it." Exactly what he said in the other chapter. Why not just say, hey, Bezalel did it just like he did with a little footnote that says, "Check back to chapter 25"? Why, seriously? It would make your Bible reading a lot quicker. You'd get there quicker, right? It would save paper and that was a huge issue back then. Why would God, it was so expensive to have extra paper, why do that? Because God wants you to hear him say, "This is exactly how it's to be done," and he wants to watch you, watch men do it exactly as he said to do it.

That happens chapter after chapter in Exodus, exactly what to do for all of these different things and then they did exactly what he said, and then when you get to the end of Exodus, chapters 39 and 40, you start to see this refrain happen over and over, this key clause, "just as the LORD had commanded Moses," 16 times in two chapters. They're finishing up the work in chapter 39 and then chapter 40 they're going to set up the tabernacle and this phrase "just as the LORD had commanded Moses. Verse 1, chapter 39, "Moreover, from the blue and purple and scarlet material, they made finely woven garments for ministering in the holy place as well as the holy garments which were for Aaron, just as the LORD had commanded Moses." Skip down to the end of verse 5, "purple and scarlet material, and fine twisted linen, just as the LORD had commanded Moses." That was the end of verse 5. Verse 7, "he placed them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, as memorial stones for the sons of Israel, just as the LORD had commanded Moses." Skip down to verse 21, the end of it, "the breastpiece would not come loose from the ephod, just as the LORD had commanded Moses." Verse 26 ends, "just as the LORD had commanded Moses." Verse 29, "just as the LORD had commanded Moses." Couldn't you just say, "Did it all according to how the LORD commanded Moses, it was all done that way"? No, he wants you to hear 16 times "just as the LORD commanded Moses." Why? Because that's something apparently we really need to hear. We really need to hear that, "just as the LORD commanded Moses the man of God who shows us how to worship." God determines how we are to worship him.

I want to just tell you in summary, I encourage you to read this chapter, 1 Kings, the end of chapter 12 and chapter 13 is the story of the building, it's the splitting of the kingdoms in two. After Solomon died, the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom split in two. The southern kingdom with Jerusalem and the temple are led by Solomon's son Rehoboam. The northern kingdom is led by a man named Jeroboam. Ten tribes follow Jeroboam, two with Rehoboam. Jeroboam, what he does in chapter 12 is he builds, he makes two golden calves and he puts them in different...he franchises the temple essentially. "It's too much trouble for my people now that are in the northern kingdom to go down to Jerusalem to worship God. I'm going to make golden calves," which it's astounding that he made golden calves. Isn't that just amazing? He apparently had not read his Bible at all. He makes the golden calves, he puts one in Dan, one in Bethel and the text says things like this, "as he decided in his own heart." And he appoints a new group. The Levites are out, don't need Levites, and he makes his own line of priests just

as he had decided in his own heart. He franchises the temple and he says, "Look, we want to worship Yahweh." He's not trying to worship other gods. He's trying to worship Yahweh his own way.

He does that and then in chapter 13, a man of God, an unnamed man of God comes from the southern kingdom of Judah up to the northern kingdom when Jeroboam is dedicating the temple in Bethel with that golden calf, and the man from the southern kingdom comes up and says, "God is angry with you." Anyway, the story unfolds, Jeroboam's hand is withered, then Jeroboam says, "Please pray for me," and the man says, "Listen, what you've done is such an abomination. God hates this." And essentially then the word of God is brought by this man of God to say, "What you have done is so utterly evil because you have sought to approach God your own way." And all through the rest of 1 and 2 Kings you'll have this refrain about the most evil kings of the northern kingdom, "they walked in the ways of Jeroboam."

God hates that. You see the emphasis in the Bible is not, we don't make it up. We come to God as he's called us to come. This means that we order our worship according to his word, not according to our preferences. We're not to make surveys or to do cultural analyses and to figure out what's palatable. We're to see what has God said and let's do it exactly as he said, as close as we can. Everything he said prescriptively we're to do, and in principle form we're to apply the rest. Everything that's not commanded is forbidden. That's the regulative principle. If it's not commanded in Scripture by a direct command or by good and necessary inference from a principle, then we're not to do it. So this is why we don't have drama in worship. God never tells us nowhere to have drama in worship. He tells us to gather around the preaching of the word. He tells us to sing praises to him. He tells us to use musical instruments to lead the people in singing and to praise God, to confess and to pray together and to worship him as we hear his word. We see him revealed not through pictures but in the preaching of the word. This is how God has ordered it

So when you're looking for a church, that's what you should be looking for, a church that's trying to be faithful to the Scripture, not accommodating to the age, the spirit of the age. And there's some issues that sometimes there's some gray areas where the Scripture may not be super crystal clear on some things but the issue is what is the heart of the leaders? Is the heart of the leaders to submit to God? That's the key thing. It's not the perfection of the church, it's the direction. It's not the perfection of the person, it's the direction, right?

That phrase, you know, the essence of the Reformation was that there was a return. The church had departed from the word of God and Martin Luther, God worked in his heart and he came back to see the word of God tells us how to be saved, the word of God tells us everything about salvation, everything about worship, and the Reformation was an attempt to reform the church back to the Scripture. The Roman Catholic Church rejected the Reformation and so it became a separate movement. But the essence of the idea of the Reformation, the real distilled essence is the idea of reforming whatever you do, whatever you think, whatever, every practice to conform to Scripture. Scripture alone is

the authority. That's the formal foundational principle of the Reformation, Scripture alone, Sola Scriptura.

Now that means that we're always reforming because we're always learning things we are doing wrong. This is the Christian life, too, isn't it? This is what progressive sanctification looks like, you get more and more like Jesus, it is a daily process of reforming. The word of God shows me how far short I fall of the standard. The more I see it and I see myself, I'm like, "Oh my goodness, I'm not living consistent in this area. I need grace. I need the power of Christ, my union with Jesus, and I need His word to guide me as to walk in ways that are pleasing to Him."

So we make changes. Well, the church is that way too. There are things that we're doing that we need to change. I don't know what they are right now but the Lord will show us. We've changed things in the past. We should keep changing, always in line with Scripture though, not in line with the spirit of the age. Other places are changing because they just want to change to be accommodating. We don't want to be unaccommodating. That's not it. We're not trying to be as unaccommodating as possible. We want to make you as uncomfortable as possible here at Providence. Welcome. No, that's not it but we want to be faithful to the Bible because if we're faithful to the Bible, then God will do his work and where we want to really feel the welcome is in the presence of God who mandates and declares how he is to be worshiped, how he is to be sought, his presence.

That's what we're called to do. That is a tremendous charge and burden. It's interesting, turn back with me to 2 Timothy. It would be a good place to close today. 2 Timothy. It's actually there are two places in the New Testament where the phrase "man of God" occurs in the New Testament. It's 78 times in the whole Bible, 76 in the Old, 2 in the New. One of them is at the end of chapter 3 of 2 Timothy, Paul's second letter to Timothy. He says in verse 16, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." I think he's speaking about Timothy in particular but in a sense all men are called to be that too, all people are called to be, people who speak the word of God for God, and equips us for every good work. He says in chapter 4, verse 1, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus," listen to that, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom," this is what you're to do, "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." You can't accommodate the spirit of the age. The spirit of the age will not accept sound doctrine.

But it's a matter of life and death. That's why Paul says, "I solemnly charge you." I mean, he was talking to his dear friend, his young disciple Timothy, and he says, "Timothy, this is so urgent and important. I am charging you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus

who is going to judge the living and the dead, you do this." It sounds just like Exodus and Leviticus and 1 Kings 12 and 13. Be faithful to what God has called you to do. That's what we're all called to do. We're called to do that in the church. We're called to do that in our homes, to do it the way God has called us to and God help us to do it.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for Your word that is exactly what we needed. We just read it's inerrant, it's perfect, it's everything we need to make us adequate for every good work. It shows us how to live in whatever circumstance we find ourselves in. Even though, Lord, we can find ourselves in situations we never imagined, we feel overwhelmed, we feel confused, sometimes dazed and just without any sense of bearing, and yet Your word is what we need and we're to minister that word to each other to help one another as the people of God, to speak the truth in love so that we won't be cast about by waves and wind of doctrine but we will be anchored, standing on the solid ground of Your word, and rooted to Jesus Christ who is our life. Make us fruitful, Lord. Help Your church to be all that You want it to be here at Providence and everyplace the name of Jesus is truly loved and the word is sought. Make all of Your people more faithful all around the world so that Christ will be exalted more, that people will truly experience Your presence, not a counterfeit of it but the reality of love that comes in the presence of our Father through Jesus Christ by Your Holy Spirit. We pray these things in Christ's name and for His sake. Amen.