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Presentation Transcript
Leading by Serving
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The title of this presentation is *Leading by Serving*. It's the third on the topic of *Empowering Leadership*, which is the third attribute of healthy congregations as defined by the *Natural Church Development Research Project*.

So we're going to start in Luke 22:24, which was one of the scriptures that we talked about in the very first presentation on leadership. You'll remember that this is where Jesus was talking to His disciples about their attitude. It says:

Lk. 22:24 – *Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. And Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those that exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater? The one who is at the table? Or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.*

Now, do you recall the context of that discussion? Yeah. They were sitting at Passover dinner. And He had just *washed their feet*. So only minutes after He washed their feet, they're arguing about who's going to be the head man. That would be frustrating, wouldn't it? And He's still having that discussion with us, and some of us still aren't getting it. Then He said:

V-28 – *"You are those that have stood by Me in My trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as My Father conferred one on Me, so that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*

So they *are* going to be rewarded, but they can never forget about being the head man. It's just not ever going to happen. And we're not to worry about that in this life either.

Okay. Lead by serving. That's what He said. Why is serving so high up on God's list of important activities? I mean, we know that that's true – that it *is* high up – but *why* is it? That's an interesting thing. Human beings are just not able to handle leadership or control.

I think about the leadership books that I've read. And they *all* seem to wind up talking about the four kinds of leadership. You know, there's *authoritarian* leadership, where there's a lot of control. There's *laissez-faire* leadership, where it's hands off. And that's real good if you're dealing with the economy, but not necessarily so good in every case as a leader. Then there's *empowering* leadership. They talk about that. And the fourth category depends on whose book you're reading as to what that one is. But some of the ones I've seen are like *democratic* leadership, or *transactional* leadership. There are various other ones. And I've heard people – even leaders in churches that I've been a part of in the past – excuse their leadership failings by saying, “It's okay to be authoritarian, because it's just a style, and everybody has one, and it's okay for me to be that way.” It would be okay to be that way if Jesus were that way all the time, right? Whatever they're talking about.

Was He an authoritarian? Well, Peter probably thought He was a real authoritarian when He said, “Get thee behind me, Satan.” That's a pretty authoritarian statement, isn't it? Was He laissez-faire? Well, the woman who was taken in adultery probably thought so when He told her He wouldn't judge her. That's kind of a hands off approach. When Jesus gave a parable about the nature of the kingdom of God, He said that it was like a farmer who planted grain, and then, while he was sleeping, it grew all by itself. That's pretty hands off, isn't it? Was He empowering? Well, I think the disciples probably thought He was, when He sent them out two-by-two to learn on their own after being trained. That's pretty empowering, isn't it? So He trained them and then He sent them out. And He did that again after He was resurrected, too. He just left. And there they were standing there, and it was all on them after that. So I think what it is really about is knowing *when* to be which way that's important for us to think about.

Now I've told you the story before about the Buddhist who taught me about servant leadership. It's really interesting that you would learn that from a Buddhist after being in the Church of God for thirty years, isn't it? He was a technician for an electronics company and they made him a manager. He said that he realized that he would soon lose his technical edge, because he wouldn't be up with all the latest things. And he realized that his employees – the technicians that worked for him – would be the people that would provide his success. So he decided that the only thing he could really do was to empower his employees by providing everything they needed to do their work. He said, “I ran along side them and served them. I did everything I could to make them successes, because I wasn't going to be successful unless *they* were.”

But you know, there's another part to that story – I think I've told it, but I haven't emphasized it before. Before he did all of that, he drove his stake in the ground – that was the term he used – and he told them that they would be accountable to meet all the company's quotas. So that's pretty authoritarian, isn't it? And it is just like Jesus and the parable that He gave, too, in Matthew 25, and verse 14. He said, talking about the kingdom again:

Mt. 25:14 – *It will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he left.*

So he gave them a lot of freedom – just like my Buddhist friend did – to work as they would. But then he came back and there was an expectation there that was very real – a very firm boundary.

I think God knows when to be an authoritarian, and when to be empowering, and when to just be hands off all together. And that's the problem that a lot of us have with leadership. So he gave them a lot of freedom to do their work, but then he came back and there was an expectation there – just like with my Buddhist friend. He gave his workers a lot of freedom to figure out how to do their job the way they wanted to, but there was always that quota. They always had to produce.

Now, God gives us a lot of freedom to use our abilities to produce for His kingdom. That's what the parable is about. He gave them His stuff and then He left. He didn't micromanage everything they did. He just left. So we're given the freedom to produce for the kingdom, but the product is always the same thing. We don't get to decide what the product is. We're told that our job is make disciples. That's the point of the church. And we do that by producing healthy congregations. No choice about the end product. But it's hard for us to find the balance between the two of those things, isn't it? Between the authoritarian and the empowering thing.

There's a scene in the movie, *Field of Dreams*, where the young Archie gets to play ball with the professionals. It's a lifelong dream he had. So he gets up to bat and the pitcher throws two in a row at his head. Knocks him down both times. And he gets up and he starts complaining to the umpire all excited. But one of the old pros, Shoeless Joe, calls him back to the backstop and helps him get back together again. And he said, "Okay, so he threw two at your ear, where do think the next one's going to be?" And he said, "Low and away." And he said, "Right. So look for low and away, but watch out for in your ear." You know, there's always that thing in life where you have to find that sweet spot in between, it seems like. And that is what God wants us to do, too.

It's very hard for some people to give this kind of freedom to produce that the master in the parable gave – and that Jesus gave the church when He ascended to heaven. After instructing us, it was like He sent us out to do our work.

I talk to parents all the time who can't let their kids have enough freedom to produce character and decision-making skills. They just try to control every move they make. I was talking to a family recently, who had a sixteen-year-old boy, and they said, "We really feel so sorry for him. We've taken everything away from him. All he does is sit at home and watch TV." Of course, that was causing problems. But I mean, they had restricted him so much because they had such high expectations for him – way above the expectations their parents set for them when they were kids – that he just didn't have any room to wiggle. So he was getting in all kinds of trouble. You know, he's going to find a way to get out and have some fun. And he was telling lies to get that elbow room that he needed. We can't seem to be able to give people that kind of leeway – that kind of empowering space to practice, and do things, and make their mistakes and learn from them. The reason they can't do that is they have some unresolved issues from their past that prevent it.

The standard operating procedure is that people come in and, of course, they want us to fix their child. So we say, “Well, the child is just responding to you. Children are responders. You’re the initiator here. They don’t set the tone in the home. You do. So they’re responding to what you’re doing. So you’re going to have to change the way you do things if you want them to change the way they’re reacting to you.” So, okay, they get that, usually. So we start teaching them how to do the things they need to do – how to tell when they should set a boundary and when they should let them have freedom, how to administer the consequences without getting angry, and all those things. Most of the time people are able to do that. But sometimes, there are those parents that just can’t find a way to do what they know they ought to do. And that’s always because their child is triggering their kid-stuff from when they were a kid. That’s what is causing the problem.

The same is true of leaders who have to micromanage the production, whether it’s in business, or whether it’s in church, or whether it’s in government. That’s *always* what it comes back to. It’s a *control* thing. Because they didn’t feel safe when they were children, they’re solution to that is to try to control their environment.

I was talking to somebody recently about their pastor. In the church we’re told that we’ve been given gifts by God that we’re supposed to use in service to the church. But some ministers won’t let their flocks use their gifts because they’re afraid it will get out of control. The reason for that – just to be as direct as I know how – is because they never learned to trust as children, so it’s hard to trust the power of God – the Holy Spirit – to work in other people now. That really is what the problem is, because God tells us that He gives gifts to all of us to use for His service. And when some *man* won’t let us use those, that’s a lack of trust on their part – that God can do what He says He’s going to do.

We started out on this point talking about the *reason* for serving – why is service so high up on God’s list? – and we made the point that there are different styles of management. Jesus used at least three of them. But at it’s core – when you get right down to it – service is underneath all of that stuff. Those are just management styles. But *service* is the important thing. And we’re going to talk more about that. Why is that true? What is the real purpose for leadership in the church?

Let’s think about this from God’s perspective for a minute. What is God trying to do with us? Well, He’s creating a family, isn’t He? That’s what He’s doing. He’s the Father and Jesus Christ is His Son. And He is the firstborn of many brethren. Those are all *family* terms, aren’t they, that explain the relationship. So He’s focusing on how to get us all there, just as much as human parents struggle through teenage with their kids, trying to help them into adulthood all in one piece, with all their brain cells in tact and all their limbs attached. That’s what He’s trying to do with us. And it’s really hard for Him, because just like all teenagers, we’ve lost our way – all of us – at one time or another. It’s somewhat like rounding up a herd after a summer of grazing on the range, I would imagine. We have some ranchers here, so they can tell stories about what that’s like.

Jesus is very plain-spoken about this objective that He and the Father have. You remember the story about the corrupt tax collector named Zacchaeus. He was a miserable person. He stole from the poor. He cheated and he exacted too much from people. He

took bribes. Well, he heard Jesus was coming. So when he saw the crowd milling, he climbed a tree so that he could see Jesus. And when Jesus got to the tree, He called out to him by name, and said, “Zacchaeus, I need to stay at your house tonight.” And everybody was offended because he was such a scoundrel. They hated that. And Jesus explained to the crowd that the reason He came was to seek and to save those who had lost their way. That’s why He said He was here. He was in the business of making disciples.

He said this in a lot of different ways. When He first called His disciples, He said, “Follow Me and I’ll make you fishers of men.” Of course, they were fishermen, right? So there’s a play on the words – another metaphor for disciple-making. There was never any doubt in their mind about what *they* were going to be doing for the rest of their lives. They were going to be making disciples. They were going to fish for men. So that’s what He was always thinking about.

He also knew that *no one* can be forced into the Kingdom of God because *all* of us have free choice. He doesn’t want anybody there that doesn’t *want* to be there. So you can’t *make* people come. So how do you help people *want* it? Well, the only way to get people’s attention that He knew of – and that anybody knows of – is to meet their needs, both spiritually and physically. So the plan was to draw them by serving.

Jesus Himself performed the greatest act of service when He allowed Himself to be killed to pay for our sins. And He said in John that that act would eventually draw *everybody* to Him.

Now there’s another movie I want to tell you about after we consider what Jesus did, and what He told the apostles they were going to do for the rest of their lives, and after what He said about why He came, and after what He told the church at the end just before He died – make disciples of all nations. So what’s the movie? Well, it’s a movie called, *The Rookie*. It’s about this guy who is in his forties. And he discovers that he can throw a baseball faster than when he was in college playing professional baseball. So his lifelong dream was to be a successful pitcher in the majors, so he tried out at forty-years-old, and he actually makes it. They put him on a farm team. Of course, he’s away from his wife and kids, and he’s not making any money, and he’s playing with guys that are fifteen years younger than he is. Playing in the farm leagues is really tough and he starts getting discouraged. And so does Brooks, who is one of the younger players who has a lot of potential. He becomes friends with Brooks. One evening, while he’s deep in discouragement, he goes to a Little League ballpark, and he watches the boys playing baseball, and he remembers that baseball was his *dream*. Now he’s *living* his dream. He thought about when he was a kid that age, and how much he loved to play, and he suddenly recaptures his vision. He goes back to the ballpark all excited and he walks up to Brooks, who is in as fallen attitude as he was just a few hours earlier – Brooks is getting ready for the game – and he looks at Brooks, gives him this big smile, and he says, “Brooks, do you know what we get to do today? We get to play baseball!”

Brothers and sisters, do you know what we get to do today? We get to *serve*. We get to serve just like Jesus did, because that’s what draws people to Christ. And by serving, like Jesus did, we enter into a divine practice of drawing people – of finding and saving those

who are distracted, slow, weak or discouraged. We get to participate in God's purpose for making disciples. And we do that by *servicing* them – by taking care of people.

I got to work in a soup kitchen this last year at the Park City Feast of Tabernacles. You could, too, if you'd come there. We'd give you a shot at it. But I got to talk to this guy who had no home. He was homeless. And he told me that he had been a drug addict and an alcoholic. But through the minister who ran the soup kitchen, he had been *found* by Jesus Christ. That's what he said. He didn't say, "I found Jesus." He said, "Jesus found me. I was *lost* and He found me." You know, I thought he was going to say that he found Jesus, but he didn't say that. And he explained to me how he'd lost his way and how he'd been rescued by Christ.

Now, it's not just alcoholics and addicts that are lost. All of us, we're told, have lost our way. When I say that, I know that it sounds like I think God is calling everybody now, but if you'll just replay that in your mind, I did *not* say that. I did *not* say that. And I hope you won't read that into what I said. It's that I know that Jesus talked in parables because He knew not everyone was being called at this time. But I also know that He said that there are so many people that He wants to call, we won't ever get around to all of them before He returns. He said that, too. So it's possible that *both* those things can be true at once, isn't it? Not everyone is being called, but there are so many He *wants* to call that we won't ever get around to all of them.

Okay. God is trying to seek and to save all who are lost. Another way to say that is that He *cares* about everybody. He cares about *everyone*. He's raising a family. And He wants all of us to be in it forever. It's His nature to be that way. Jesus said, "My Father and I are one." And His goal, He told us just before He died, was to have *us* become one with Him and the Father the same way that They're one together. Remember that? We read it every Passover. When He said those things, He wasn't just talking to the disciples. He was talking *to* everybody *about* everybody. God wants *everybody*. He wants *all* of us. He wants everybody that's ever lived, everybody that's living now, and everybody that's going to live. He wants us *all*. It doesn't matter where we came from, what language we speak, what nationality, what ethnicity, what race we are. He created all that and He wants all that. He wants *all* of us. But *we* have huge problems with that, as human beings. We have *huge* problems with that.

You know, you think about how God designed us with handles on us, so He can draw us to Him. He made us in His own image. And He is a *relational* being. So we are also relational, social beings. We generally want to go *toward* relationships. You know, that's why when we're having family problems, for most of us, it's so incredibly difficult. Because we *want* it to be good. That's how we're built. We go that way, generally. And we naturally want family to work. But we're learning, in our society, that when the parent-child bond isn't healthy early on, some children *act* as though it doesn't matter if their parents are there for them or not. And they call these children *avoidant children*, because it looks like they're avoiding the relationship. It's like, "Oh, I know I'm not going to get taken care of, so why sweat it?" And mom walks out of the room and they continue to play with their toys like they don't miss her, and when she comes back, they act like they don't notice she's there.

Now, when these little children grow up, they have another label they put on them. They call them *dismissing*. These are the kind of people who believe others will always let them down, so they don't often engage. Or if they do engage, the first time there's a problem, they leave the relationship. They blow the other person off. They want to relate, but they act as though it doesn't matter. Now, there are even extreme cases of this, where we see people who do things deliberately to scuttle their relationships, because they've been hurt so much in childhood that the relationships frighten them. We see this a lot in the foster treatment care system and among adopted children, who have been passed around from foster home to foster home. They start to feel a connection toward their parent, and then they're whisked away from that, and that attachment is broken, and then they have to start forming another one. So after a while, in extreme cases, they call it *reactive attachment disorder*. They do things to deliberately push people away from them without realizing what they're doing. This tendency to approach people, but then to avoid later – there's a technical term for it and it runs through a lot of attachment problems – is called *approach avoidance*. You may know people like that. They start to get close and then they pull away. That can be present in both mild and extreme situations.

People who are healthily attached as infants...that doesn't mean that they never have any relationship problems with people. But those people that have healthy attachments generally try to resolve the problems – go toward *fixing* the relationship. But the folks that don't generally tend to walk away. That's part of the problem we're having in our culture. People aren't willing to hang in there with the relationships and try to work them out.

Now I have to add a caveat here. There is nothing really simple about any of this. I was talking to a friend of mine, who is my own age, who was telling me that while he was going to college – and you know how college students are really poor; he was – he bought an old car from his uncle. And on his way home from his uncle's, with this car to his house, the engine blew. He called his uncle from a payphone and told him about it. His uncle said, "Tough break. It's your car and your problem." He wouldn't even come pick him up. So my friend told me, "I hung up the phone and said, 'Oh, I don't think I need to spend any more time with him. It's only going to cause me problems because of how he is.'" That's probably a pretty accurate assessment. When somebody does something like to a young person, it really says something about their nature, doesn't it? That it's going to be problematic. So he wisely extricated himself, as much as he could, from that relationship. He spent a lot of money on bus fare after that for awhile.

Now my friend appears to be a healthy person. He's happily married. He has good kids – all of that. So sometimes, you know, it just makes sense to stay away from people who will only cause us trouble. That *isn't* an attachment problem.

But when people blow others off without attempting to resolve problems.... Let's think about the uncle for a minute. He's like that, isn't he? He really didn't care about his nephew. But when people blow others off without attempting to resolve the problem, that's quite frequently – if there's nothing else driving it – an attachment problem.

Now, Western culture has been called the *dismissing* society because so many people grow up with insecure attachment. And we don't work very hard to resolve our problems. We crawl into our cubbyhole at work and stare into our computer screen instead. Or we come home and we play video games all night so we don't have to relate to other people in the family.

I was talking to a woman recently whose husband keeps her at arm's length. He won't talk to her about anything. After awhile of this, she explained to him that she was unhappy, and she wanted to resolve it and talk, and would he go to marriage counseling with her? And he refused. So, I think she made it perfectly clear, after he refused, that, if things don't get better, there's no reason for her to stay there. I don't she has the same prohibitions against divorce that a lot of us do, but that's how she's thinking. So she *wants* to work on the relationship – and I'm sure he has his side to tell, too – but it seems that he's *not* willing to work on it – that he doesn't *value* the relationship. She is the one that wants to fix it and he is the one that doesn't want to. All this kind of thinking takes us in just the opposite direction that God wants us all to go, doesn't it? He wants us to learn *how* to resolve our relationship problems. And He wants us to *care* about each other, and become *one*, and understand that we're all in the *same family*. But for some of us, family doesn't mean caring about others. It just means trouble. It's trouble in the most important thing that God focuses on – His family. I mean, it all gets back to that.

You know, I was thinking about how this is happening in our society. Satan is very *subtle* about the way he works. He does his damage *early* in many cases – in the first year or two of life. Because of that, we're starting to see an epidemic of attachment problems. Anxiety and depression is escalating to epidemic proportions in our culture because we're not designed to be isolated as children. And when we are, we're depressed and anxious. And as more people are the product of divorce, more people are finding relationships more difficult.

We've talked earlier about *borderline personality disorder* and how it ought to be called *emotional dysregulation disorder* – if I can use that psycho-babble term for a minute. It's so hard to relate to other people when our mood is too high or too low, or when our emotions are out of control or out of reach – feeling them too strongly or not feeling them enough. And you know what? New research is correlating borderline personality disorder with divorce and attachment issues. That's where it's pointing to.

Caring about people. That's what God does. And that's what He wants us to do. And Satan is working his best to try to fix it so that the *caring about* part is taken away from us. Paul talked about society, where people are lovers of their own selves and don't have any feelings for other people – without natural affection. That's what I think is happening now in our society. So that's bad because, when you don't care *about* people, there's no reason to care *for* them. And that's serving – taking care of people – serving people, right? When we care about others, it motivates us to take care *of* them.

All of us need help, and we all have gotten lost. And so, by designing us to take care of each other, we naturally want to take care of one another. And that's what healthy people try to do. When Jesus said, "You guys need to quit fighting over who's going to have the

power and start thinking about how to take care of each other,” He was also talking about how the church would grow. Same thing. When we sacrifice our time to serve others, it makes an impression on people.

I remember Guy Swenson telling that his congregation is out there working on the homes of the elderly and the poor in their community. And so far, none of the elderly poor that they’ve taken care of have come, but other people have driven by and seen them working, and stopped, and wanted to help and become a part of that. And now, because of that, their congregation is starting to grow. It’s a nucleus of people who want to get involved in taking care of other folks. It’s a pretty good nucleus to start with.

When we start caring *about* others, then we also want to take care *of* them. When we do *that*, it makes a positive impression on people – that we’re sacrificing our time to *help* others – and those that value that want to become a part. I’m not talking about doing things for people that they can do for themselves. That’s called *enabling*. I’m talking about doing things for people that they *can’t* do for themselves. That makes an impression on folks.

Now we could beat this around a lot more, but I think most of us know service and have experienced it. So I’m going to move on and ask another question. Why does God call taking care of others and service leadership? Why does He call it that? Well, it gets back to what we said in the first presentation on this topic, and that is *knowing the right thing to do* is leadership.

Every Thanksgiving the president of Southwest Airlines makes a symbolic gesture. He goes to an airport somewhere in the US – he can go there for free because he runs the airline, right? – and all Thanksgiving morning he loads baggage, because that’s the heaviest travel day of the year. And that’s the day that the baggage handlers at the airport are stressed most. So he goes and he helps. Somewhere in the country he shows up with his leather gloves and he loads baggage all day with the crew. By that he’s saying that he’s willing to work with the troops, on the ground, to get the job done. Now we can see that as leadership, can’t we? Right. He’s on the ground leading the way.

We talked recently about the 7th Cavalry commander in Vietnam, who told his troops he would leave no one behind. Living or dead, he was going to bring them *all* back. That’s taking care of people, isn’t it? Nobody wants their dead body left to be mutilated by the enemy on television. So even if we’re dead, we would hope somebody would extricate us. And that’s leadership, isn’t it? Clearly seen.

I think about the times Jesus was mobbed by sick people who wanted to be healed. He would always stop to take care of them. His schedule got put on hold while He did what He considered to be the most important thing. That’s leadership. That’s showing us what we need to do.

In the beginning of this, I also said the only *real* leadership is *moral leadership*. I wish I had been smart enough to think of that myself. I really didn’t. I heard that from Jim O’Brien first. He probably read it somewhere. He reads so much. Knowing the right thing

to do and doing it – that’s what gives us the moral high ground, doesn’t it? Caring for the whole family of God is the right thing to do. And actually taking care of them is doing it.

Let’s go to John 13:12. It says:

Jn. 13:12 – *After He had washed their feet, and had taken His garments, and was sat down again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you?” And nobody answered, so I guess He answers His own question. “You call me Master and Lord, and you say well. For so I am.”* Oh, they called Him Master and Lord. Why? Well, because they recognized that He knew more about the Kingdom of God than they did, so they were willing to sit at His feet and be taught. They wanted to learn to do the right [thing] and they realized He could teach them. So He had the moral authority, didn’t He? And it wasn’t that He *made* them call Him Master and Lord. Did you notice how He said that? He said, *“You call Me that.”* So they were *willingly* submitting to His authority, *because He had the moral high ground.* He said then, *“If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you.”* He was teaching them the right thing to do by doing it to them – serving them.

We have a psychiatrist here in town. He’s the head of the Behavioral Health branch of the state’s largest HMO. I don’t think he practices his psychiatry anymore, but he uses that to augment his business experience. Every year, on his own, he sponsors a series of seminars for therapists on ethics and on supervising other therapists. And he does this because he realizes that the work therapists do is very stressful. And when therapists get stressed, they make mistakes, they inadvertently hurt people, and they also get themselves in a lot of trouble. So he, all by himself, has set about to change the laws in this state to provide training – that’s not being provided now – for therapists, to provide support for therapists – so they have a way to unload all the stuff that is loaded onto them all the time – and an effort to change the ethical standards in our profession, so that admitting to weakness and seeking help is okay. And he does this all to take care of the other therapists in this state and he charges *nothing* for it. He does this several times a year. He usually brings in outside speakers to speak on their areas of expertise. He charges not one red cent to anybody to come to these seminars. He *servicing* us. He’s taking care of us. Is that leadership? Well, it certainly is, isn’t it? It’s clearly so.

Even sometimes, if not in the church, service is recognized as leadership. And so it is, when any of us – from the oldest to the youngest child – offers to help someone else, we’re in a leadership position. We’re doing the right thing because we know to do it.

Okay, that wraps up coverage on leading by serving. We’ve talked about leading by example and now leading by serving. Once these two aspects are in place – the moral position is established – so the next and final aspect is about using leadership to help people go *forward* in the church’s work – leading by *empowering* – empowering people to do the work of the church. And we’re going to see why this characteristic causes congregational health and growth. We’ll talk about all of that next time.