

What Makes a Healthy Church?

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[0 : 00] I'm not going to ask you to turn to Luke this morning. You may, if you really pay attention to the bulletin, you may notice there's no title there, sermon title, and don't get the idea that I'm not going to preach.

I'm going to do that, but I want to preach something a little bit different. As a matter of fact, I'm going to share a message with you that I have preached before, but most recently in China.

And in fact, the Sunday that we were there, I shared this very message with the Great Commission Church. That was their name. And Daniel, their pastor, that's his English name. I don't know what his Chinese name is, but it's real helpful for us Americans when we work with people in the churches there in China that they all have English names.

And they're quite typically, of course, Bible names or even some Bible doctrines. Grace is a very typical name. And so anyway, Daniel, pastor of the church, shared with us really the day before that we went to the church and preached and worshiped with those dear people, told us about his church and some of the needs of their church.

And I wanted to know if I would preach to that need. And I said, well, yes, I can do that. And so I preached this very message to his church out of Acts, and you can be turning to it, Acts chapter 9, verses 20 through 25.

[1 : 48] We'll read that here in just a minute. Acts chapter 9, verses 20 to 25. And the churches in China are in many respects, at least in this one particular respect, similar to churches all around the world, I'm sure, including here in the United States.

That is, the church needs the people of the church to be very much involved in the work of the church.

And I would say perhaps it is a more critical problem with these very young churches filled with very young believers we're talking about in many cases.

And most of the people of these churches are what you would call first century Christians, first generation, excuse me, first generation Christians.

And so very little foundation, other than their faith in Christ, very little foundation about how churches should be and what you should do in the church.

[3 : 02] And so consequently, many of the churches in China rely very much upon their pastor. And he might have a co-pastor, a co-worker, and they just rely on the pastor and a few of the leaders to do all the work.

And so there's a great need for the people of the church to be involved in the ministry, to serve and to teach and to lead and to serve in the church.

There's a great need for deacons. Wes went with us last year and shared with them about what the Bible says about deacons and about our deacon ministry. And there's a huge need for deacons in the churches.

And so anyway, I wanted to share with him a message that comes from this text. Although, really, I'm not going to preach an expository sermon out of this passage.

Actually, I'm going to preach a sermon that is based upon one single word. Now, that's not unusual, actually, in the kind of the approach of expository preaching.

[4 : 16] I have always advocated that you can preach a sermon out of just from one word in the Bible. Many opportunities I've had to teach people in Ukraine and also in China and to share with them about expository preaching.

You know, we kind of start with paragraphs. You ought to preach through paragraphs. That's probably the best way, best approach. But you can preach parts of a paragraph of Scripture.

You can preach a sermon from one single verse of Scripture. You can preach a sermon from a phrase from a single word. And I really believe that, and I've done that. God's Word is inspired of the Holy Spirit, and that means every single word.

And so, if there's one word that really speaks volumes to us from the Word of God, then we can preach just one word.

And yet, I would say to you that this morning, I'm going to preach a sermon from a single word, and the word is not even mentioned in the passage. You say, is that possible?

[5 : 19] Well, it is, because though the word is not mentioned here, it is here. It's in the story. It's a very key part of the story. It's a crucial element of the story, even though the word, per se, is not in the text.

It's implied, clearly implied, more than implied. It's a very big part of the story. And so, I want to preach a message from this passage on a single word.

And what is that word? Well, you'll find out here. Let's start with verse 20, and let's read through verse 25. Immediately, he...

I think we need to make a little contextual note here. He is Paul, all right? We don't have the benefit at this point to look back before this passage. And so, I just can tell you that Paul is the he here.

So, Paul preached the Christ in the synagogues that he is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed and said, Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?

[6 : 36] And, of course, the very same one, wasn't it? But Saul increased all the more in strength. It confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

Now, after many days were passed, the Jews plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul, and they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket. All right, there's the story. And hopefully, you're wondering, What is the word that this sermon is going to be preaching about?

Really, the entire message is based upon some truths or realities about this one word that's not even mentioned in the text, And yet, it is here.

It's implied here. It's crucial to the whole story. And the word is rope. I bet you never would have guessed that. Rope.

[7 : 46] You don't see rope in the story. Well, not the word. And yet, it is here, isn't it? Here's the apostle Paul. New. I mean, this is just really beginning in his ministry.

In fact, many of the disciples, we might even say most of them, were not quite sure about Paul. In fact, they were afraid of him. The very next verse, we didn't go this far, but in verse 26, it mentions that they were afraid of him.

And I guess, really, we ought to allow that and understand that. I mean, Paul had been persecuting the church just shortly before this time.

He'd been taking letters. We could even call them arrest warrants to various cities to arrest Christians, to put them on trial, and in many cases, have them killed, at the very least imprisoned.

And the apostle Paul, of course, was present, then called Saul, was present when Stephen was martyred. And so they had maybe some reason to be afraid of him. And so here is the apostle Paul preaching from the get-go after his salvation.

[8 : 59] In fact, earlier in this chapter, we have his conversion. And so he's preaching Christ, that he is the Son of God, and the people of this particular city weren't too keen on that.

In fact, the religious leaders had already plotted to have Paul killed and would have had him killed if it had not been for some faithful disciples who maybe were not quite sure about him, but they at least helped to save his life.

And they let him down out of a window, out of the walls of the city so that he could escape and went on to, of course, be the great apostle Paul.

Now, how did they let him down through that window? It had to have been a rope. The Bible says here, basket. That's what he was inside of, some little harness, something that he could sit in or be held in, and, of course, attached to a rope, and they let him down out of the window.

Now, when I shared with this pastor, Pastor Daniel, that I had a thought from God's Word, an application from God's Word that would possibly encourage his church and help his church, it had to do, pertained with some truths about this rope in the story.

[10 : 30] I think you would agree that the rope, though it's not mentioned by name, was a very important part of the story. And I would maintain to you that we can learn some important lessons about the church, about all of us, and about what I think would contribute to a healthy church, all of it coming from some realities about this rope in the story.

I think we all know the value of a good rope. You know, it's amazing to me when you think about it, all the modern technology today and all of the various devices and computerized devices and all kinds of inventions that have come along to help us do particular kinds of work and so forth, that the rope is still something we need today.

It's always good to have a piece of rope somewhere. And so it's a useful tool. In fact, I would even tell you that, and some of you parents probably have discovered this, it's a pretty fun toy, too.

You know, we go out to Walmart or some of the expensive department stores and pay a lot of money for some, you know, computer toys and such, and they don't even have to be computerized to be expensive today.

But really, if you want to entertain your children, of course, under supervision, just let them have a good piece of rope, you know. Supervision, you don't want them to go out and hang themselves.

[12 : 00] But our boys like to play with ropes. In fact, it was one of their, I think, delights to try to tie up Dad with a rope.

And, you know, we'd be sitting there on the couch or watching TV or doing something, and they've, you know, got the rope down there, and they're winding it around my legs and trying to tie good knots and such.

And then, of course, they'd be utterly amazed that just like that, I could get right out of their ropes, you know. But they just enjoyed ropes. We had a neighbor when we lived in Nacogdoches, Texas, an elderly fellow, and he got for all three of our boys in.

This was prior to Jonathan. He gave them each a rope, and he would keep it hanging up inside of his little, kind of little shed out in the backyard. And so when we would go over to visit with them, and we did that quite often, he'd get out those ropes, you know, one for each of the boys, and they'd tie them to trees and try to climb up in their trees and do all kinds of things.

Ropes are just really fun toys. But they're useful tools. And that's the case here in our story. A very useful tool, especially when you consider that the rope was attached to one of the greatest preachers, greatest missionaries that has ever lived.

[13 : 23] And so because it is, the rope here is associated with the Apostle Paul and saving his life and therefore preserving his ministry, then the rope in the story is very significant.

And there are at least three things that we can learn from this rope, and these three things, I think also, by application, will help us understand something about a healthy church or what makes a healthy church.

In fact, I might even bring that down before the church family, what makes a healthy family, a Christian family. Three things about this rope that we all need to learn.

And here they are. They're really very simple and really very logical when you think about them.

And as soon as I name these, you're going to say, well, I can kind of see that about the rope here.

This first one isn't even part of the story, but it is implied.

And here's the first lesson. Someone made the rope. Wouldn't you agree? I mean, there is a rope in the story, though the word doesn't appear there.

[14 : 35] There was a rope that was used to let Paul down so that he could survive, escape imprisonment, escape being martyred.

And so they used a rope and somebody made that rope. Now, we don't have any idea who made that rope. Anything about that in the story. We just must assume it's a given that someone made the rope.

And it had to be a good rope because it had to, of course, hold up the weight of the Apostle Paul as he was depending upon this rope to take him to safety.

So it had to be a good rope. So good rope. Somebody made the rope. And someone made a good rope. Now, I would apply it in this way.

And that is the principle of discipleship. The principle of discipleship. That is, everyone must make ropes and make a good one.

[15 : 42] Make good ropes. And we could apply this into a number of contexts and all of them related in some way to the church. In fact, really, we need to start with the smaller family unit.

I mean, the church is a family, but a church is made up of families. And we should apply this, the making of a good rope. We should apply this to the discipleship that's to take place within the family.

That is, the parents to the children. Did you know, and we have a number of young parents here, younger than me, and who still have kids in the home, and I guess, you know, I'm not very young, still have a kid in the home.

Although he's pretty much on his way out, I think. He's about to eat us out of house and home anyway. But, so we have a number of parents.

You've got children in the home. Did you know that what you're doing is making a good rope out of these kids? The rope, in this case, represents children.

[16:48] And so, the very first kind of unit or the first context of rope making takes place in the home where parents are making good ropes.

I take you to Deuteronomy chapter 6 and probably the quintessential passage of Scripture, not only for the Jews, but you cross that over into the Christian world.

And this passage is tremendously important for parents. And the Bible says, Hear, O Israel. In Deuteronomy chapter 5 and verse 4, or 6 verse, yeah, 5 verse 4.

6 verse 4. Are you with me? Hallelujah! All right. I think I might still be on the airplane. In chapter 6 verse 4, Hear, O Israel.

God wanted Israel to hear something. And he had a number of things to say to them. He said, The Lord our God, the Lord is one. So that's, first of all, God is one.

[17:50] That is, he's the only one. And so hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength.

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. But then he goes a step further. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

That is everywhere and every time and every opportunity. You are to speak to your children about the things that God has commanded us. It's a responsibility for parents to make good ropes, good, strong, good, useful ropes, strong, useful children.

And the textbook we have, in fact, the only book for rope making is right here in my hand. And you have a copy of this in your hand and in your homes.

And we don't have to go really any further. I know there have been a number of other books that have been written and maybe thousands of books that have been written on parenting and how to raise your children in the Lord.

[19:03] And I'm sure many of those are very helpful as long as they're scripture based. But really, the most important book, the book that tells us exactly how we ought to raise our children, make good ropes of them is right here in my hand.

It is God's Word. And so we have a responsibility. We're talking about a healthy church in the larger context, but we start with the family. Churches are made up of families.

Some are just starting their families. Some don't even have kids yet, but will have. Some of you have children and they're still in your home. Some of you are helping to raise grandchildren and great-grandchildren and so forth.

So we have a great responsibility at the family level, the family unit, to make good ropes. Then when we go beyond that, because we have to, we need to, this kind of rope making takes place within the larger family, the family of God, within the church family.

where, according to Scripture, in fact, we won't turn to it, but in Titus chapter 2, we have women training women. That is, older women, not just old in age, but older as in the sense of spiritual maturity.

[20:23] Teaching the younger women. We have men teaching the younger men. And we have a responsibility within the church to be disciples. We have some here who are teachers and they're teaching children in the nursery and in Sunday school.

And then we have other teachers teaching young families. And we have lady, women teachers teaching women. And we have, we have the older senior adult Sunday school classes and where there are teachers that are hopefully, through their Bible study and the preparation to teach, they are making ropes.

And we have those of you who are working with our Awana ministry and other ministries, other children's ministries and events throughout the year and men, teaching men, Brother Tom, and we have the women's book study.

And these are all opportunities for God's people to be involved in making good ropes. A healthy church is marked by good rope making.

Discipleship. And we have to bring it to the level of the pastor and other leaders in the church and teachers, of course. And 1 Peter 5, 2 speaks really to my role and that is to shepherd the flock of God among you, to feed them and to act like a shepherd.

[21 : 49] And so, it is my responsibility to make good ropes out of all of you by teaching you God's Word. So, I'm to shepherd the flock of God among you.

And also, Ephesians chapter 4, verse 11, where God says that He gave to the church specific people for certain roles and for certain times. I mean, there were the apostles and the prophets and I believe they've come and God has given them to the church and now their job is done because we have the completed Word of God.

Then He gave evangelists and I think those are the missionaries that are sent around the world and even in our own community. And then He said pastors and teachers. So, He's given pastors and teachers to the church for what purpose?

Well, He said to build up the church. To build up the church. The pastor and teacher is to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry so that we can all come to a level of spiritual maturity.

See, what it's all about is rope making and every one of us can be, should be involved in that kind of work within the church.

[23 : 01] Whether it is as a teacher and you have a group of people you're teaching and you are making ropes out of them and discipling them. Certainly the family, mom, dad, making good ropes out of your children, teachers in the church, even friends, one-on-one kind of relationships.

Where you are sharing God's Word with a friend or another brother or sister and being an encourager. And we're even rope builders, rope makers rather, by our very lives and the way we're living it and as we model that to the people all around us.

Somebody made a rope and it was a good rope because it held up the Apostle Paul and we all are to be involved in rope making. You say, well, I can't teach.

Well, there's something you can do. And all of it works together to make us a mature body, a healthy church. Somebody made a good rope, everyone should be involved in making ropes.

It's the principle of discipleship. Then there's a second thing here about the rope that really, I think, is very obvious. I mean, it's obvious that somebody made the rope, though we may argue that that's not really even important to the story.

[24 : 22] But since we're making an application of the rope, I think it's very significant. Somebody made the rope, that's obvious. But secondly, and this gets us more to the story itself, and that is, you would agree with me, that somebody held the rope.

Somebody held the rope. And I think this is a picture or the application would be service, or let's use the word dedication, dedicated to serving the Lord in the church.

This goes, certainly includes teaching and serving in this way, but it goes beyond that to encompass all things that are done within the church and within the body of Christ.

Someone held the rope. Now, the story tells us that the disciples, it doesn't name them, but there were some disciples that held the rope for the apostle Paul.

Now, remember I said that the disciples, in fact, it tells us in the very next passage in verse 26, that they were afraid of Paul, not sure about Paul, not sure that his conversion was real, not sure that what he was preaching, that his so-called ministry, that it was not just some ploy, some trick to get on the inside, to maybe discover more offenders against Judaism and maybe taking down names and reporting those names.

[25 : 48] They weren't sure about the apostle Paul, and so maybe this even makes what these disciples did even more profound, that they were willing to save, to preserve the apostle Paul's life by holding the rope for him.

It's a picture of dedication. It's a picture of service. And so when we apply that to all of us, every one of us are to be rope holders.

We're to hold the rope. I want you to think for a minute about what would be missing in our lives as believers if these disciples had not been willing to hold the rope for the apostle Paul.

Or maybe they were a little lackadaisical in their work, their holding, and maybe let the rope slip, and well, too bad for Paul.

Just think about what we would be missing today if the disciples had not been willing to hold the rope for the apostle Paul, that one they were not real sure about.

[26 : 55] Well, for one thing, think of all the churches in Asia Minor that would not have been planted because the apostle Paul would be dead. Either he died because they, you know, made it to the ground a little bit too fast, or they just weren't willing to protect him and save him and the authorities of the city had him arrested and put to death.

Think of all the churches that the apostle Paul was instrumental in planting and starting that would have never been started. And you can go a step further. Think about the gospel to the Gentiles.

The apostle Paul was the one appointed by God to take the gospel to the Gentiles. And go a step further. Think about the New Testament. Think about the books of the New Testament.

The apostle Paul wrote more than half of the books of the New Testament. Think about that. What would have happened if these disciples had not been willing to serve the Lord in this way and even risk their lives in some way and not willing to hold on to the rope for the apostle Paul.

The churches that would have not have been planted. The gospel that would have not initially gone and rapidly gone to the Gentiles. The books of the New Testament would not have been written.

[28 : 15] And then think about those books themselves and the rich doctrine that we have in these books. Think about how the apostle Paul was the instrumental writer of the New Testament to hammer out all of the doctrines of the faith.

We wouldn't have those here in the New Testament. I'm just saying theoretically. You can say, well, God would raise up somebody else to do it. But think about it, though, in these terms. The apostle Paul was a key figure in the church.

And this is at the very beginning of his ministry. And the church was not sure of the apostle Paul, but they were willing to risk it and hold the rope for the apostle Paul. And we benefited in all these ways because they preserved his life.

Now, I want to make an application there. What would happen to this church or what will happen theoretically if you don't hold the rope?

That is, if you don't commit yourself, dedicate yourself to the service of the Lord from including all of everything, even some of those things we might consider to be insignificant.

[29 : 26] And really, there isn't anything insignificant in the service of your church, the service of the Lord, from your tithing to your attendance to your worship, to your work and support, your prayers, to your fulfilling certain roles in the church, support roles, teaching roles, nursery working, whatever it is.

What will happen to the church if God's people are not willing to hold the rope? That's what I said to this bunch of Chinese people there in Daniel's church.

And I didn't even know them other than to know that Daniel, very burdened, very concerned for the work of the church because he's having trouble getting the people of the church involved to actually serve the Lord.

And I asked them, I looked at them eye to eye and in their faces and said, what will happen to this church if you are not willing to hold the rope?

Somebody must hold the rope. And I would say everyone should not only be rope makers but also rope holders.

[30 : 44] What will happen to any church if God's people are not willing to hold the rope? Let me state it positively. What could happen to any church, this church, any church, if everyone held the rope?

What could happen? Can you imagine? And not just for this church but what could happen to this community? And not just this community but what could happen in this country if God's people in churches like ours all around this nation really were committed, dedicated to rope holding, that is, serving the Lord in the church?

What could happen to this country? What could happen to this world? I said the same thing to this group of what, you know, maybe 20 and many of those were children and here, I don't know, 130, 40.

What could happen? I said to them, what could happen to Shenzhen, a city of 16 million people, if everyone in your church, I said to them, would make good ropes and be willing to hold the rope to

serve the Lord?

Well, we just can't answer that, can we? I mean, we can't answer it with any specifics. But we ought to answer that in a very positive way that great things could happen.

[32 : 16] Now, you know, there's always room for more of us to be involved in rope holding in the church. And God will do wondrous things.

So, think about this rope. I know the rope is not there in the story. I mean, it's not mentioned by name. But these two things that I've, I have mentioned, two applications, I think you can see that. somebody had to make the rope. And, and it was a good rope. And so, by application, every one of us should be involved in making good ropes at home, in the church.

Someone has to hold the rope. That is, we, we must serve the Lord. There must be dedication. So, there's discipleship, there's dedication. dedication. And then there's the third thing that, really when you think about it, should mean a lot to every one of us.

That is, obviously, someone trusted the rope. In this case, it was a certain someone, someone that's quite famous, and that is the Apostle Paul.

[33 : 38] You think about Paul. you know, they're not too sure about him, and he knows that. And so, here he is in an absolutely vulnerable position, being let down out of a window, presumably, you know, outside the city walls so that he could escape death, certain death.

He had to trust the rope. He had to trust the rope holders. Now, what's the lesson there for us?

Well, perhaps it's not a lesson for the group.

I mean, that is in the sense of, you know, an ongoing kind of need for our church. This speaks more to the individual. That is, like Paul, we need to be trusting others.

Paul did not go it alone. Paul was not what some have called a lone ranger Christian.

You know, I'm just going to go it alone. Paul had a very serious need in his life at this time in his ministry, and there wasn't anything he could do for himself.

[35 : 04] he had to trust somebody else. There are times in your life as a believer when you're struggling, maybe because of some catastrophe, some loss in your life.

Maybe you're struggling because of some kind of spiritual thing. Maybe you're just in a time of confusion, weakness.

Need someone to be there for you and to trust them to encourage you and maybe even counsel you. Now, sometimes we just have the idea that we need to keep these kind of things to ourselves.

That, you know, we've got the strength, we'll just, you know, we'll just grin and bear it and pull up our boot straps and get in there and fight and we'll just take care of this on our own.

But those are times we need to be honest. Those are times we need to trust somebody else.

Somebody to hold the rope. Now, having said that very thing, obviously the implication on the opposite side, the other side of that is we need to be willing to help others in our church.

[36 : 35] We need to be aware of the needs of others in our church. For someone to trust another in the church, that other needs to know.

There needs to be a relationship there between all of us so that we know when someone needs a rope holder. But the issue that I want to address is a more private, more personal issue for each of us.

That we would allow ourselves to be vulnerable to someone else. Allow ourselves to be honest about our true need, whatever it may be, where we just can't do it ourselves.

I'm not just talking about financial things. Those things arise as well. We need to be honest about them. I'm talking about a host of other things, personal things, times of sin even, struggling with sin.

We need to have a confidant that we know will pray for us and not be a gossip, obviously. we may need to trust the pastor.

[37 : 57] We need to confide in one another. We need help. We need support. We need prayer. We have times when we're confused and hurting.

Instead of just closing up, you know, to ourselves, we need to trust somebody to hold the rope for us. Paul did.

Paul trusted these men. I'm sure he barely knew them. And what he did know probably didn't instill a lot of confidence in his heart. Because they weren't sure about him.

But he trusted them. In fact, it's interesting, and I want you to turn over to 2 Corinthians 11. 2 Corinthians 11, and I want to just start reading with verse 30.

actually, I'll just read the first phrase and then say a little bit about that. Paul says in verse 30, if I must boast, boast about what?

[39 : 09] Well, Paul had a lot to boast about. I mean, if boasting was the right thing to do, he had a lot to boast about. What were his bragging rights? Well, he's already listed them. You have to go back to verse 22.

He said, are they Hebrews? He's speaking of other Hebrews. So am I. You know, he could boast of the fact that he was a Hebrew. In fact, in another place, he said he was a Hebrew of Hebrews. As touching the law, he was, he was, you know, almost flawless. He was a Pharisee. Now, we're talking about his pre-conversion life, but he said, if anybody has anything to boast about, I do. I'm a Hebrew. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool.

I am more. Think about that. Paul's saying that, the audacity of that. I'm more. I'm more. more of a minister of Christ.

[40 : 11] In labors, more abundant. In stripes, above measure. That is, I've suffered for Christ more than anybody else. In prison, more frequently than anybody else I know.

I'm just kind of adding, this is what Paul is saying. Of course, he's about to make a point, of course. He's not bragging. But he had boasting rights, he had bragging rights, and he's kind of listing these. You know, in prison, more in death, deaths often from the Jews. Five times I received 40 stripes minus one.

Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeys often, travel more than any of the rest of them. In perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and toil and sleeplessness, often in hunger and thirst, in fastings, often in cold and nakedness.

[41 : 27] And he doesn't even finish the sentence. We could insert often besides the other things. What comes upon me daily, my deep concern for all the church, the burden that Paul carried around with him for the churches.

These are his bragging rights. But then he said in verse 30, if I must boast, I'm not going to boast about any of those things.

He says, if I must boast, if there's anything that I have a right to boast about, be proud of, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.

What does that mean? When he thinks back over his life and all the things that he has experienced and all of his credentials and all of the things that he has done for Christ and suffered for Christ, he said, I don't boast about any of those great achievements, those great things, even my persecution. You know, that would be considered great things, persecuted more than any other believer. That would be something that some might brag about and boast about. But I don't boast about any of those things.

[42 : 55] I boast rather in the things which concern my infirmity, my weakness. That is, I boast in those times in my life when I have been brought to utter vulnerability, weakness, where I had to depend upon someone else.

You say, how do you know he's talking about that? Because of what he says next. He said, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

He knows the truth of this. In Damascus, the governor under Aratus, the king was guarding the city of the Damascene, that's Damascus, with a garrison desiring to arrest me.

He didn't even mention the fact he was going to kill him. But I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped from his hands. Paul said, if I have anything to boast about, it's not that I'm a Hebrew of Hebrews, Pharisee, expert on the law, or I'm of Abraham, seed of Abraham, or that I have ministered more than anyone else, suffered more than anyone else for Christ, I'll boast in the times when I was so absolutely vulnerable that I could do nothing but trust someone else. And then he mentions this example that we've been looking at in Acts. Now, do you understand the point?

[44 : 44] We have the idea that really being vulnerable, being weak, is something that we should hide, something we shouldn't talk about, something we shouldn't be too proud of.

Those times when we've been utterly weak, where we just couldn't, we couldn't make it without somebody else, that we kind of want to, you know, tuck away those chapters in our lives and not talk about or think about those and certainly not bring them up.

But here Paul is saying, this is what I glory in. Those times I was so utterly weak that I had to trust somebody else. I had to trust the rope.

Now, these are three things about the rope, three applications. And though they are not so much directly connected, it's not a progression of things. They kind of lead us and cause us to look in three very key, three different, the very key areas of Christian life, of church life.

One is discipleship that every single one of us are responsible for. Whether it's in an organized way as a part of the ministry of the church that we're involved in, whether it's in the home, or whether it is, you know, kind of relationships that we have with other people in the church.

[46 : 14] We're all rope makers, or should be. And we should be very dedicated to making good ropes. And then we are all rope holders, or should be, serving the Lord in His church.

There's something for everyone to do. Holding the rope, in a sense, holding the rope of the gospel, the ministry of the gospel, which God wants to accomplish through this church.

And then there are times when we must trust the rope. Trust a rope. We must trust somebody. We must allow ourselves to be vulnerable.

We must allow ourselves to be honest, transparent, open. Not necessarily on a public scale. Not everything has to be brought up here and give testimony to your week.

But in smaller circles, and depending on what it is. There may be a time when God would lead you to stand before this congregation and say, I need your prayers.

[47 : 33] I'm struggling with this and such. church. We need to allow ourselves to be honest in that way. Trust the rope.

Three marks, I think, of a healthy church. Whether it's a church in Shenzhen, China, in some part of that great city that you couldn't find if you were, if your life depended upon it, find it.

With maybe as many as 20 people, or whether it is this church, be a good rope maker, a rope holder, and a rope truster.

Trust the rope. Take care. Thank you.