

# Aaron's Failure of Nerve

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 10 November 2024

Preacher: Chris Oswald

[ 0 : 0 0 ] You're listening to a sermon recorded at Providence Community Church, Truth and Beauty in Community. If you are in the Kansas City area, please consider joining us in person next Sunday.

We meet in Lenexa, Kansas at 10 a.m. every Lord's Day. Until then, we pray that as you open your Bibles, the Lord will open your heart to receive His Word.

You can be seated. We'll dismiss our kids to children's ministry. And if you'll open your Bibles to the book of Exodus, we'll be in chapter 34 today. Sorry, Exodus chapter 32 today.

The story of the golden calf is probably not mostly about idolatry, though that might be what you'd think initially. The only reason I say that is that even throughout all of their idolatrous worship in that passage, they seem to be intent on worshiping the Lord.

It's a little bit of a not ideal passage. There are better passages, I suppose you might say, if you wanted to talk about idolatry. What is the main point of this particular passage?

[ 1 : 0 9 ] You know, I think it's leadership. We won't go into all of the examples of leadership in this passage, but we will see that really the whole point of this is the different interactions that Moses has with the Lord and the interactions that Aaron has with the people.

Everything pivots around the inaction or action of these two men. And while this passage is obviously showing us that people have their own responsibility for their sin, the focus of responsibility in this passage is to show that Aaron has a unique responsibility as a leader.

In verse 21, Moses said to Aaron, And look at how Moses sees this.

He sees this primarily as something that Aaron is responsible for. And in verse 24, So I think that what this passage is mostly about is about leadership.

And of course, if you study the Old Testament and the New Testament, you see that for a very long time, the people of God have been plagued by poor leadership. This sort of thing shows up on just about every other page.

[ 2 : 3 8 ] Why does that matter to you? I just think that it's time for each one of you to acknowledge the extent to which you are leaders in various ways, in various roles, and so on and so forth.

This is not the time for false humility, which we'll talk about here in a moment. Now, some of you are positional leaders. You have a title, husband, father, mother, household manager, a leader at work or a leader in the church.

But I would say that all of you are relational leaders. All of you have influence in the lives of others. Pastor Jonathan Lehman, a guy who's been very kind to me over the years, tells his church the day that tells the members that join the day they join.

He says this to them, It's essential to understand that as a local church, we are a system of discipleship.

Discipleship doesn't simply happen in the pulpit. Discipleship happens in the fire pits. Well, not in the fire pits. Around the fire pits. Around conversations with fellow ladies and so on and so forth.

[ 4 : 06 ] Our whole point is to spend time together and to direct one another, to lead one another up to Jesus. And so I think that this sermon on leadership is relevant to each one of you.

And if you're still going to be stubborn and say, Chris, I promise I'm not leading anything. Well, okay, I'll tell you this. Everything we're talking about today has a lot to do with the fear of man.

And I've never once preached a sermon on the fear of man that didn't land on almost everyone who listened to it. It's something we all struggle with. So even if you're going to tell me I'm not a leader in any way, I would tell you, well, this is all about the fear of man.

And that's something that each one of us struggles with. The Bible says it's a snare. And then my experience says it's a very common snare. So let's get into this passage. What is the basic problem that Aaron has succumbed to?

Well, this is something that the poet Milton in *Paradise Lost* referred to as effeminate slackness. That's Aaron's problem. Effeminate slackness.

[ 5 : 09 ] Somebody much, a rabbi many, many, many years after Milton said that it was a problem of failure to nerve. That would be Edwin Freeman. One of, I think, the most important books that have been written in this century is a book called *Failure of Nerve* by Edwin Freeman.

Pastor Bob Thune describes failure of nerve this way. He says, Now, if you don't want to read Edwin Friedman's book, *Failure of Nerve*, there's a book published just recently called *Emotional Sabotage* by Joe Rigney, which is a much smaller, much more Christian, Christ-centered version of that book.

I'd encourage you to think about these things further after we move past them in this message. But that's where Aaron found himself. He found himself in a situation that Friedman would call an unhealthy emotional system.

Listen to the list of descriptors that Friedman gives for an unhealthy emotional system. I think we've got them up on the screen. Emotionally unhealthy systems are marked by reactivity.

This is that thing we talked about last week. We must do something. This is something. Let's do this. They are marked by a hurting instinct, a mob mentality.

[ 6 : 35 ] We tend for the sheep to get exacerbated together and follow the most anxious one off the cliff. Unhealthy emotional systems are marked by blame displacement.

It's always somebody else's fault. And unhealthy emotional systems are marked by a quick fix mentality. Relief from pain is more important than lasting change.

We see all of these descriptors present in the story of the golden calf. This is the leadership environment that Aaron finds himself in. He finds himself in this precise environment.

Now, when leaders find themselves in an emotionally charged, full of anxious anxiety environment, whether that be in a conversation with their spouse, their kids, in a local church, when they find themselves in a conversation like this, in a situation like this, there are one of two temptations.

And the first one is to become the bully, and the second one is to become the bullied. And we see evidence of both of these in the Bible. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on the problem of being the bully, but I do want to discuss it.

[ 7 : 44 ] Because I don't want anyone to leave here thinking that growing a backbone equals yelling at people or being a jerk. Right? So there's a temptation. Your flesh will hijack this moment, and you can go into one of two ditches.

One is to be a bully, and the other is to be a doormat, to be the one who is bullied. And what we're going to see today is that God provides a different option. So I do want to talk a little bit about this temptation.

That's kind of the opposite of effeminate slackness. And that would be, when people all around you are losing their heads, you lose your temper.

When people all around you are losing your heads, you lose your temper. Anger is one way this could go. It's one likely way this could go. It did not go that way for Aaron, but we see in Numbers chapter 20, later on in the Exodus story, that it did go that way for Moses.

You know, Numbers 20 on its face looks like just another day in the wilderness. The people are complaining once again. They're grumbling this time about a lack of water.

[ 8 : 50 ] Moses does what Moses does in all of these situations. He goes to the Lord, and the Lord gives him very specific instructions. He says, go back to the people and stand over this rock and speak to the rock.

And when you speak to the rock, it will split open and water will issue forth. But on his way back to these people, who have tested and disrespected Moses at every turn, who had pressed and pressed and pressed Moses' right to even lead, on his way back from the Lord to the rock and to the people, his anger gets the best of him.

And so in verse 10 of Numbers 20, we read, Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, Here now, you rebels, shall we bring water for you out of this rock?

And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their livestock drank.

Now, God had his back. He did not cause Moses to lose face in this instance. That would have caused a greater calamity. They were already on edge. But in reality, Moses had sinned in his anger.

[ 10 : 01 ] In his anger, he had violated what God had told him expressly to do, not to strike the rock as he had done before, but to speak over it. And for that, even that, Moses was disqualified from entering the promised land.

God says to Moses and Aaron, Because you did not believe in me, this is verse 12, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.

So I just want you to be aware that we're going to talk mostly today about growing a spine, but I want to be sure that you don't think that growing a spine means losing your temper. However, that's a problem as well.

Whatever it means not to have a failure of nerve, whatever it means to stand up firmly for the truth, it must be reconciled with what Paul teaches in 2 Timothy 2, verses 24 through 26.

Whatever your vision of backbone is, it has to go in line with this passage. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

[ 11 : 14 ] God may perhaps grant them repentance, leading to a knowledge of the truth, that they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil after being captured to do his will.

The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, ladies and gentlemen. Do not comfort yourself in your sinful anger by saying, well, at least I stand up for the truth. No, actually you're lying about God in your very tone, in your very temperament.

You're telling lies about God. You're not representing the truth. So one option that we have to be aware of when times are tense and people are anxious and they're full of sin as people are, is that we could become the bully.

We must not do that. But the other option, and it's the one that we see in our passage, is that instead of becoming the bully, you become the bullied. Don't become the bully.

Don't become the bullied. My time is done. Thank you. No. It really is that simple. Now, the one thing I think that it should be said is that very contrary to the extremely feminine, emotional, how I feel is how things are way, that the world is gone, the problem in leadership is always mostly about leaders not having backbone.

[ 12 : 31 ] The leaders who get angry exist. We don't like that. That's not good. But our world would say that that's the main problem of leadership, and the Bible would just say that's not the main problem.

The Bible from the very first page forward says that the main problem, the primary temptation leaders face when facing anxious people, is to become a doormat, is to exude what Milton called effeminate slackness.

This is true in the case of Saul in 1 Samuel 15. This is the case of Peter in Antioch when he feared, when he did not eat with the Gentiles.

This is the case over and over in the scriptures. The main temptation, friends, is not to become the bully, though that temptation exists. It's to become the bullied. Now, look at Exodus 32, verses 1 through 2.

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, Up, make us gods who shall go before us.

[ 13 : 35 ] As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. So Aaron said to them, Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, your daughters, and bring them to me.

So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf.

And they said, And they said, These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Now, what we have here is a particular kind of folding, a particular version of a lack of backbone or failure of nerve, and that is this idea of baptizing a people's unbelief or managing their sin.

Now, friends, I want to let you know that if you've got someone in your life who's not independently committed, fully committed to living for the Lord completely, you're going to face a temptation to manage their sin rather than to call it out.

That's what we see here. We see Aaron attempting to baptize the unbelief of those who are sinning. In 2020 and 2021, race riots took place all over the country, and plenty of prominent Christian evangelical leaders tried to baptize the sins of rioting and looting by appropriating biblical categories of social justice to what was simply sin.

[ 15 : 08 ] In the same time, government massively overstepped their authority, shutting down churches, mandating masks, and later vaccines. 50% of all Democrats at the time believed it would be appropriate to put people who refused vaccines in concentration camps.

And plenty of prominent Christian leaders tried to baptize these clear sins with other biblical categories like loving your neighbors and Romans 13, trademark pending.

You see, the mob wanted to run in a particular direction, and many evangelical leaders did the biblical gymnastics necessary to endorse the mob's anxious cravings.

And that's what we see Aaron doing. In verse 1, they come to him with a demand, Make us gods who shall go before us. They're ready right then to completely abandon Yahweh altogether.

Make us gods. You fill in the blank, Aaron. We just want some gods. Aaron concocts a scheme. He baptizes their unbelief by constructing a golden calf.

[16:18] Listen to how he responds in verse 4 and 5. He received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

They're ready to leave Yahweh altogether. These are your gods, O Israel. When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation, said, Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.

You see how he's trying to redirect their sin without confronting their sin? You see how he's trying to baptize their unbelief?

Friends, I do think you're probably a leader of something. And I just want to let you know that this is a common category. When you're trying to lead or influence or encourage a brother or sister in Christ who has chosen to go their own way in this or that thing, it is a common category to concede pieces of their explanation, concede pieces of their story in hopes of keeping a larger redemptive grasp and managing them through this difficult thing.

You have times where people are just straight up lying to you. They're just straight up lying. And you say, Well, I can see how you feel that way. It's like, How about just tell them you're not telling the truth.

[17:38] Let's start there. Tell me the truth. There are all sorts of ways that we think we are clever and sympathetic and empathetic and that we can, because we're this clever, manage people out of their sin.

That's what Aaron's trying to do here. He's trying to baptize their belief. And it doesn't work. It actually leads the people to great, great harm, greater harm, indeed, than if he had simply stood his ground.

So what do we do in terms of explaining where this comes from? What explains Aaron's meltdown? Well, the bad news is, is that we can't rely on Aaron to explain himself.

Aaron is self-deceived. Look at verse 21. He's an unreliable narrator. When Moses said to Aaron, What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?

And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my Lord burn hot. You know the people that they are set on evil. For they said to me, Make us gods who shall go before us.

[18:47] As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. So I said to them, Let any who have gold take it off.

So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf. Men, if your marriage isn't right, this is going to be a temptation for you.

To say, I have no idea how this happened. It just happened. Suddenly my kids don't listen. Suddenly this, suddenly that.

No. The golden calf didn't magically appear. Your failure of nerve made it appear. So we can't rely on Aaron to explain why he did what he did, but we can go through the word of God and see various other instances where people have lost nerve, and see sort of, Okay, this is why they lost nerve.

And the first one I would point to is this problem of false humility, which I would say is actually kind of a prideful insecurity. I mentioned earlier that one of the people who lost their nerve would be King Saul.

[ 20 : 03 ] In a couple of instances, he succumbed to the will of the crowd, even though he had been given specific instructions by the Lord on how to lead. In one instance, he is caught by Samuel and confesses his reason for sinning was simply this, I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.

Now, why did he fear the people? What's going on that the tallest man in Israel, the first king of Israel, the one appointed and anointed by Samuel himself, is afraid of the people?

Samuel tells us exactly why in verse 17. Samuel said to him, Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel?

The Lord anointed you king over Israel. What does false humility look like in an instance like Aaron or Saul? It looks like thinking less of you than God does.

It looks like taking your role less seriously than God takes your role. It looks like an insecurity that is rooted in unbelief.

[ 21 : 19 ] You see, the false humility is actually very proud because it ignores what the Bible says. It ignores what God says. Saul is thinking little of himself, and he is in sin for doing so.

He is not taking his role seriously because he is in unbelief. He simply doesn't listen to the word of God. He listens to his feelings. He listens to the crowd and so on and so forth.

So how is it possible that Saul or Aaron succumb to this failure of nerve? One possibility is that they were actually engaged in what you might call a prideful insecurity.

They were simply not accepting the mantle of leadership that the Lord had placed on them. Man, Ephesians 5 doesn't say that you should become the leader of your home. It says you are.

You just are. You're the head of your household. Now, you can choose to do lots of things with that, but what you can't choose to do is to pretend that you don't matter or that you matter like everyone else matters.

[ 22 : 22 ] Nope. Aaron had a unique responsibility. You have a unique responsibility. And whatever you're called to lead, friends, not just husbands, but whatever you're called to lead in general, as a leader, you have a unique responsibility.

So let's not be falsely humble. Let's acknowledge that God places us in positions of authority, sometimes relationally, sometimes positionally, and you refusing to acknowledge that isn't helping you or anyone else.

And it's not actually humility. It's not. The second possibility is related, and that would be what you might describe as emotional blackmail.

When people get into a state of highly charged anxiousness, they are prone to leveling a very specific charge against their leaders, and that is that the leader is a bully and that he thinks he is better than everyone else.

This is constant. This is a constant source of slander for leaders. We see this happening in Numbers chapter 16. Now Korah, the son of Izar, and Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan, and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and the son of Peleth and Reuben, took men, and they rose up before Moses with a number of people of Israel, 250 chiefs of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men.

[ 23 : 41 ] They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, you have gone too far, for all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them.

Why then do you exalt yourself above the assembly of the Lord? This is a tale as old as time. The second reason that leaders sometimes lose nerve is they are simply afraid of being emotionally blackmailed with this charge that comes from highly anxious people.

You think you're better than us! Friends, the accusation of pride and heavy-handedness and lording it over is so consistent that many leaders lose nerve.

They're afraid to exercise any authority at all because they know that in the coming volleys in response to that exercise of leadership will be charges of accusations of pride and heavy-handedness.

I always think it's funny when I meet someone, because, you know, I don't put on a lot of airs, and I do that on purpose, but I always think it's funny when people meet me and they tend to say things like, Chris, you just seem so humble.

[ 24 : 50 ] That very same person who thinks that will think of me prideful later. There's people who are looking for a kind of unassuming person because they think that means that they'll get to do what they want.

But as one pastor once said, the greatest test of maturity in a Christian is how they respond when they don't get their way. And very often, when the saints don't get their way, they call the leader arrogant.

And so maybe one of the motivations for Aaron is that he is being emotionally blackmailed. He's afraid to lead with a heavy hand because he knows the next charge will come, as it always does, that he is full of himself and thinks he's better than everyone else.

There's another possibility, and that would be what you might call love of position. It is possible that Aaron would rather be an ineffectual leader than no leader at all. There are plenty of leaders like this.

There are plenty of people who would rather be an ineffectual, impotent, spineless leader than to not be a leader at all. And so they succumb to the pressures of the crowd so that they can remain in a titular position of authority, I suppose.

[ 26 : 00 ] They can keep the title. They do whatever the mob tells them so that they can stay ruler of the mob. Not really, of course. And then the fourth motivation is the one that I think we have to look out for the most.

I think it's the trickiest one, and that is simply an inordinate love of people. You might say, well, Chris, is it possible to love people too much? If it dwarfs your love for God, yeah, it's possible.

See, one of the things that I've learned over time and I see in the Bible over and over again is that God programs good leaders with deep feelings for his people. God programs good leaders with deep feelings for the people he's called to lead.

In Philippians, Paul talks about having the very affections of Christ for those people. In 2 Corinthians, when Paul lists all of his troubles, let me just read this to you so you understand how God deposits deep feelings in the hearts of leaders for those he leads.

He's listing all of his sufferings. He says, imprisonments and countless beatings and often near death. And five times I received at the hands of the Jews the 40 lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods.

[ 27 : 11 ] Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I was adrift at sea on frequent journeys in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from the Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea.

We should make a kid's song about this. Danger in the wilderness. Danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers in toil and hardship and through many a sleepless night in hunger and thirst often without food often without food and cold and exposure.

This is how he ends his list of sufferings. And apart from all these things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all of the churches.

You know, I have a good, close relationship with this older man who his name is Greg Dernberger. You know him. He's preached here a number of times. And just respect that man so much.

And as I've gotten to know him over the years, I've also learned, like, to predict, know when he's going to be in a fussy mood. And when he's not going to be the full of joy Greg, he's going to be a little more of the angsty Greg.

[ 28 : 21 ] And you know when it is? It's when any one of the churches he cares for is in trouble. His mood isn't the same. If even one church in his little network that he oversees isn't doing well, he's kind of a cranky Greg.

God does that to leaders. And again, I'm not really just talking about pastors here. I think you need to understand this husbands, mothers, those people that you're called to lead, God fills your heart with deep feelings for them.

But you know, the flesh has access to those deep feelings too. Like, it's wonderful that you feel deep love and affection and concern or anxiety even for the people you lead, for your wife, for your kids, for your church.

It's a good thing. God gives you those emotions as a gift, but it is very easy for the flesh to take those emotions and lead you into sin to accommodate those particular feelings.

This is a very, very old sin. Husbands in particular, please pay attention. In 1 Timothy 2.12-14, Paul gives some apostolic insight into the fall of Adam and Eve.

[ 29 : 35 ] He says, I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man. Rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

So the question that arises from this text is, okay, if Adam was not deceived, why did he sin? We know that Eve took the fruit because she was deceived, but what about Adam?

I think this passage is actually making more of a point about the way men interact with women than about something about women in particular. And I think what he's saying here is what the early church fathers, I don't remember which one said this, I couldn't find it, but one of the early church fathers I remember reading in describing, why did Adam sin?

Why did he eat the fruit? He said something to the effect of, Adam did not eat the fruit because he was deceived. Rather, with eyes open, he partook, for he feared being alone.

In Milton's Paradise Lost, of course, Milton is describing, you know, all of these events in poetic form. And I think Milton must have had access to some of these, when he would have, these early church fathers, because he actually goes into this very particular detail.

[ 31 : 01 ] Adam, at first amazed, the poem reads, but perceiving her lost, he sees Eve eat, resolves through vehemence of love to perish with her, and extenuating the trespass, eats also of the fruit.

Milton writes an inner dialogue that Adam is thinking as he sees his wife willingly partake of this fruit, and it says, however I with thee have fixed my lot, certain to undergo like doom if death.

Consort with thee, death is to me as life, so forcibly within my heart I feel. I think that's the key line. So forcibly within my heart I feel.

The bond of nature draw me to my own. My own in thee, for what thou art is mine. Our state cannot be severed. We are one. Our flesh, to lose thee were to lose myself.

Where does Adam's failure of nerve come from? It comes from this inordinate affection for his wife, in which he is simply unwilling to depart from her.

[ 32 : 17 ] He would rather sin against God than be separated from his wife. That doesn't happen at all anymore, does it?



Men never sell out the truth, an important, gentle, calm conversation about the sin in their wives' lives. Men never refuse to do that so they can have a peaceful night.

they never choose to sin against God so that they won't have to be in any way separated from their wives.

You know, moms never do this to their kids. Moms never compromise on discipline. Moms never say, oh, they're so sweet, I love them so much, I can't lead them well.

That doesn't happen, does it? Pastors never do that. I never look at someone who's already going through the ringer and having such a hard life and refuse to offer some curative exhortation.

[ 33 : 24 ] Friends, we don't have to be evil to be stupid. Sometimes our hearts are full of really good things that are simply not appropriated in the order that God has assigned them to be appropriated.

It is completely common for us to love the creature more than the creator who is forever blessed. And we have special loves and it's those people that we especially love that can sometimes wind up exacerbating our failure of nerve.

There are plenty of instances of this that fall outside of marriage or the home. There are plenty of older women who have, by God, been given authority to exercise a Titus II-like authority over younger women, but how often do we really see empathy being chosen over exhortation and a failure of nerve in that relationship that God has given clear descriptions to and how it should go and so on and so forth.

And friends, we are not any strangers to welcoming young men in with sins of the flesh who have been walking with Christians for years but never had an older man tell them anything other than, I'm sorry, that's really hard.

The lack of exhortation that happens even intergenerationally is actually one of the reasons for our immaturity in the local churches. The people who have been given relational authority by state of their age even simply refuse to exercise that authority.

[ 35 : 00 ] They're just too nice. The gospel of niceness is really destroying us and I wonder if it was the actual sin behind Aaron's concession.

Just so we're clear and I'm not making an explicitly, like, the main thing I'm talking about is leaders stepping up and certainly not blaming women.

There's this beautiful part in Milton's Paradise Lost where an angel shows Adam all of the sin that has followed or will follow and one of the things that the angel shows is that in the future godly men will be seduced by the daughters of men or something like that in the poem.

And Adam in the poem his first response is, man's woes hold on the same from woman to begin. Meaning it's all the women's fault. And the angel contradicts him and says, that is not it at all.

From man's effeminate slackness it begins. Where does it begin? Effeminate slackness. A failure to lead.

[ 36 : 11 ] A failure to lead well. A failure of nerve. So how should Aaron have responded? The people come to him and say, up, make us gods that shall go before us.

As for this Moses, we don't know what became of him. Up, make us gods who go before us. How should Aaron have responded? Here's what Aaron should have said. Five words. I don't work for you.

Do you want to know how you can escape the failure of nerve in whatever leadership position you're set in? These five words. I don't work for you.

That is the truth. I work for the Lord. And he ought to make it clear to these people. He should have made it clear to these people.

Listen, I'm working for the Lord. I'm not working for you. He's told us what we should do. He's told us how we should act. And I hope you'll join in trusting God with me.

[ 37 : 16 ] But if you won't, then I will, with great sorrow, need to show you the door. That's how Aaron should have responded. That's how he could have escaped the failure of nerve.

I don't work for you. I work for the Lord. There's a term in Friedman's book called self-differentiation. It's where the leader simply says, you guys can lose your head if you want, I'm not gonna.

Now, in the story, and this is another reason why I think this is such an interesting leadership passage, in the story, you've got three leaders present, actually. You've got Aaron, Moses, and Joseph. Joshua.

And Joshua is witnessing all this. He's not a real player in it, per se. He's just witnessing all this. But later, Joshua becomes the self-differentiated leader. He says to the people, as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Friends, that's how we can lead in a way without a failure of nerve. We have to say to our wives, to our children, to our churches, I don't work for you.

[ 38 : 29 ] I work for the Lord. Now, I think it'd be a good time, we're going to have to wrap up, this is going to go too long, I'm going to cut a bunch of it. I think it'd be a good time to say, I am so grateful that our church is not a chronically anxious environment.

If you're visiting today, this is not one of those times where the pastor is standing up giving a message in defiance to all of his people's rottenness. Now, honestly, I was thinking this week while I was in Florida, how wonderful it's been to serve for now coming into eight years in a church that has really allowed our family to be who we are and letting you be who you are, and it's just been wonderful.

So if you're stepping in on this, this isn't some kind of cryptic message to a bunch of stubborn people in the pews. I'm so grateful that God has not allowed that to take place. Why is that?

What has God done in our midst? What has God done in our midst to not allow this to be the case? I believe it comes down to our particular view of the gospel and explicitly God's self-differentiation.

I believe we actually know that God saved us not because we deserved it, not because he was required to, but that God saved us simply because he decided to save us.

[ 39 : 48 ] I believe that's the heart of the gospel that shapes a group of people away from anxiety and into this sort of calm, peaceable state. A people-driven gospel makes people-driven churches and forces leaders to be people-driven leaders.

But a God-driven gospel creates a God-driven church and allows the leaders themselves to be God-driven. I won't read it all because we need to wrap up, but Moses intercedes.

The Lord wants to destroy the people and Moses intercedes. And what is the reason that Moses provides to God why he shouldn't destroy the people? Is it because they'll do better next time?

That's not going to work. Is it because God, you have to because you say you're good? No, that's not going to work. That's not going to be emotionally blackmailed. Why is it?

Is it because these are good people? No. What is the reason that Moses appeals to that causes God to relent? His own glory. His own namesake.

[ 40 : 51 ] That's the reason. I want to argue to you that if you want a home or a workplace or a church or a marriage that is properly self-differentiated and not succumb in anxiety, this understanding of God, that God has complete freedom, complete sovereign freedom, he owes you nothing, he does whatever he pleases, and whatever he does, he does for his own glory, I believe that that is the fundamental thing that makes the difference in various cultures.

Mark Favres writes, while most people believe God saves people for people's sake, i.e. because of his attraction to them and his inner compulsion to promote and honor them, Psalm 106.8 and many other passages tell us that God is in the business of saving sinners for his own name's sake, for his own honor, promotion, and glory, in considering his grace and mercy toward his people, God repeats through the prophet Isaiah, for my sake, for my sake I do this, I will not yield my glory to another.

So in conclusion, the world is in desperate need of leaders who are, to quote the meme, unbothered, moisturized, in their lane, focused, and flourishing.

We need those leaders, bad. And the way we get those leaders is that all the leaders in this room need to understand you don't work for the people you serve. You work for their joy, but you do not report to them.

You report to the Lord. We'll transition to the table, and this stands as a symbol of how God accomplishes salvation. Jesus was the master of self differentiation.

[ 42 : 31 ] John 2.23 says, when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many people believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus, on his part, did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

Jesus was never once motivated by keeping the crowd together, by keeping the crowd there. Jesus was never once succumbed to a failure of nerve, and that's because he only worked for the Father.

John 5.19, so Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you that the Son can do nothing on his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing, for whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

If you want to be a leader that doesn't succumb to the failure of nerve, you must keep your eyes on the Father. You must serve the Lord and the Lord alone.

You can, of course, and should love people. You can, of course, and should be sympathetic people and understanding and peaceable and gentle, but ultimately, friends, your point of failure is when you take your eyes off the Lord and put it on that wave of people who are tossed to and fro.

[ 43 : 47 ] So I want you to come to the table today and understand that your salvation was purchased by a Jesus who only served the Father, and to see that if that much glory came from his incredible act, then you should follow in his lead, and do ye likewise.

Come now.