Preparing for the Things Ahead

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Church, it's good to be with you today.

I know that the end of the year brings a lot of reminiscing over what has gone on. And so I have a question for you this morning.
How was 2025 for you? I know that at some point you had a very best moment of 2025. And at some point you had a very worst moment of 2025.
I may have had my worst moment last night as I played football with some of my nephews and my niece. And I jumped to catch a pass and rolled my ankle and fell to the ground.
It was quite humiliating as my brother-in-law so graciously pointed out to me as I limped back towards the house. But we don't know when these moments would come.
[1:11] We don't know the highs and the lows and what they may look like. Christmas and the celebration of Christmas may have been a high or a low for you.

We recognize that. I know for us we had a wonderful Christmas. And I'm grateful to the Lord for that. In fact, all of Chelsea's family is here with us today.
So I'm sure they would appreciate meeting you and being reminded that their son-in-law has a job and is employed regularly. That would be wonderful if you'd let them know. But I also recognize that there may be years in the future that Christmas is not so full of joy.
It may be a difficult season for you. In fact, just this week I know that we lost two of our church members. Sean Morris, who was a Sunday school teacher of mine as a kid.
And Gary Cooner, who I've been on mission trips with. So be in prayer for their families. So my next question for you is, what will 2026 hold?
[2:21] What will happen? Well, we don't know. You may have some ideas of what it may hold. You may have some theories and thoughts and plans. But at some point in this next year, you will have your very best moment.

And you'll have the most difficult moment of the year. Are you prepared for that? Are you ready for that moment?
One of the great gifts and responsibilities of the church is spiritual formation. Paul reminds us in Ephesians 4 that God has given apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ until we attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood.
Spiritual preparation. Paul knew this. He taught this. He demonstrated this. As we've already read in Philippians 4, verse 12, it says, I know how to be brought low.
I know how to abound in any and every circumstance. I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
[3:50] A few Mondays ago in staff meeting, we were discussing the purpose and the intent of the music that we sing. I'm so grateful for John and the way that he leads us so faithfully each Sunday.

There are a lot of great songs. There are a lot of catchy songs. But the things that we do in this place together as a corporate body, it's far too important to waste even a moment.
Even a lyric of a song. And if the things that we're doing in this place are not serving to build us up and equip us for the faith, in the faith, in God's word, then what are we doing?
John said that we don't sing when I fear my faith will fail, when our faith is failing.
We want to build the spiritual muscle memory so that when the time comes, we are ready. And the music that we sing serves to do that for us.
[5:03] We do this in a variety of ministries across our church. Miss Kathy will often tell our children that sin is anything that you say, think, do, or don't do that displeases God.

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Now, she doesn't only do that when she's standing in the hallway after a child has disobeyed or gotten in trouble. She says that before the opportunity for disobedience has come. She's working to prepare them to build spiritual muscle memory into these children so that they know when the time comes to disobey.
Wait, hold on. Anything I do or don't do that displeases God. That's sin. She's hoping to equip them and build them up.
Our men's institute is a great, in-depth, two-year Bible training program. It's wonderful. It's wonderful. But we don't just do this so we have a bunch of smart guys walking around our church. That's not the goal. That's not the intent. The goal is that we are equipping and building up men to lead their families and to lead in ministry in the church.
[6:11] That's the goal. We're preparing them. We're equipping them. We're giving them spiritual muscle memory. And as you turn to 2 Timothy chapter 3 this morning, I believe that this is exactly what Paul is doing for Timothy.

2 Timothy chapter 3. Paul is born in Tarsus, approximately 5 AD.
He's Jewish, ethnically, and he's a Roman citizen by birth. In Acts 9, he encounters Christ. He begins to preach Christ, to proclaim him.
And this preaching of Christ leads Paul into all kinds of difficulty. However, he preaches from a place of joy and thankfulness. Why? Because he understands the temporary state of his sufferings, of the persecutions, of the things that he faces.
It's all temporary. It's just like we sang, the night of weeping will be the morn of song. We also sang, eternal joy is in your hands and all of our tomorrows.
[7:27] The difficulty that we face is but a vapor. It's just a moment in time. But in that moment, it's hard and it's difficult.

Often it is unexpected. And we must be prepared. We must be ready for the things that we face.
About 60 AD, Paul arrives in Rome and is under house arrest.
We see this in Acts 28. By 62 AD, Paul is released from house arrest. It's believed that Paul begins to travel again. And he writes 1 Timothy and Titus at this time.
And then after that, we kind of are not totally sure where Paul is, what's going on. There's some theories out there. But by 66 AD, he is arrested. And he is returned to Rome.
And he is charged. Likely for the fire of Rome in 64 AD. Nero trying to pass off blame to believers, to persecute, to blame them for something that they didn't do.
[8:33] Paul is charged. And he will be put to death. Paul knows that at any time, someone may walk into his cell and lead him to his death.

And it's in these circumstances that we see Paul's spiritual muscle memory at its finest.
He doesn't complain. He's not upset. He's not distraught. He's not lost faith. He's not throwing in the towel.
He's not giving in to the demands. He simply turns to his true child of the faith, Timothy, writes to him and wants to help prepare him because he knows his time to help Timothy is coming to a close. He engages in discipleship, the preparation of a younger pastor who is leading a church in Ephesus.
[9:43] He knows he has a responsibility to him and he wants Timothy to face his difficult circumstances, his persecution with the same faith that Paul is facing his with.

And I think we can learn from this, we can gain from this. 2 Timothy 3, verse 10, it reads, as you, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, my sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconiseum, at Lystra, which persecutions I endured, yet from them all the Lord rescued me.
Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived, but as for you continue and what you have learned and have firmly believed knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in christ jesus all scripture is breathed out by god and profitable for teaching reproof for correction training and righteousness that the man of god may be complete equipped for every good work the first thing i want you to see here that we observe from this text is found in verses 10 and 11 and that is that we are to follow faithful examples we are to follow faithful examples and this is the first step that paul is giving timothy on how we are to prepare for what the

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future may hold we follow faithful examples again verse 10 says you however have followed my teaching my conduct my aim in life my faith my patience my love my steadfast my steadfastness my persecutions and sufferings paul begins this section by saying you however because he wants to draw direct contrast to the things he's talking about in verses 1 through 9 in verse 1 we see that there will be days of difficulty why well because we live in a sinful world among sinful people who act sinfully in 2 through 4 he gives a description of what ungodly people will live like what they will be like in 5 through 9 he then talks about people who will appear to be believers and creep into the church and they will bring about sinful issues and try to destroy people's faith paul is essentially describing the way that the world will react when things don't go their way the way the world will respond in the midst of their sin and he wants something different for timothy 1 through 9 he's talking about sinful people living in a sinful world and the natural progression of that but for timothy and for us he wants him to follow the example he has set the example that we find in scripture we see that timothy has followed paul's teaching his conduct his aim in his life his faith he like paul was patient and loving and steadfast during times of difficulty timothy has done this but paul wants to make sure that timothy will continue in this we see in verse 14 but as for you continue in what you have learned don't give up don't throw in the towel so what is paul doing for timothy he's setting an example and this is something we all need in our life faithful examples and at different seasons of my life i could point to different men who have been faithful examples for me who have poured into my life trained and discipled me as you know i'm working uh on a on another degree through midwestern right now and um i was in a i was on an online lecture and uh the the professor sent up uh put up in one of the slides a uh a chart and uh it's from a hermeneutics book that i read years ago i took a picture of it during the the lecture and i sent it to my father-in-law because i can remember him walking me through this exact same book soon after i'd given my life to christ he was a faithful example for me as the lord has led chelsea and i through life
he continues to give me faithful examples men who are in front of me in life and in ministry men i can follow and look to and gain advice from i'm so grateful for them and paul wants to be this for timothy he is this for timothy and he's laying out this example of what it looks like to have someone set an example for us and we watch their life and that is how we prepare for the things to come we watch them and how they live and it builds our own spiritual muscle memory so what does this look like for timothy first of all he follows his teaching in verse 10 this would obviously refer to paul's teaching of the faith timothy would have been well acquainted with paul's letters that he had followed for followed the faith for most of his life and he was continuing to do so we believe that paul led timothy to christ which is why he refers to him as my beloved child and he wants to continue to set that example for him so his teaching he also looks at his conduct timothy looks at paul's life he examines it he sees how to follow it the way that he lives and to me this implies that we have to have people around us that are in close quarters with us we can't simply just follow people on a youtube video or on instagram we need to know these people we need to have people in our life that are actively discipling us in every class that i complete jeff and i schedule a time to go to panda express because that's where good training and biblical counseling is done is at panda express and i walk through my course and the contents and the things we worked on and he gives me examples out of his counseling sessions in his life and his ministry things that he has done i'm watching his life and i'm examining him in close quarters we need real life examples of how we are to live of what that spiritual muscle memory looks like timothy also follows paul's aim for his life earlier in chapter 2 verse 10 paul says i endure everything for the sake of the elect that they also may obtain the salvation that is in christ jesus paul's goal in life is to proclaim the gospel and he wants the same for timothy to live out the gospel to proclaim it and to honor christ in all that he does and timothy is following this and we should do the same that should be our goal as well to proclaim the gospel and honor the lord with all of our life he follows his faith this is to trust in and have a total dependence on god absolute dependence on god and timothy is watching this in paul he follows this and i'm sure this turns into paul correcting timothy giving him guidance giving him advice he follows his faith he follows his patience who struggles to be patient i know i do we all have moments that we're not patient that we fail to trust the lord with with whatever it is that's in front of us but timothy like paul is patient he follows him in his love this is the first fruit of the spirit that's listed in galatians 5 22 and it should be an identifying mark for all of us that we are a loving people
first john 4 7 says beloved let us love one another for love is from god and whoever loves has been born of god and knows god anyone who does not love does not know god because god is love and this passage continues into what we just celebrated this christmas season verse 9 in this the love of

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god was made manifest among us that god sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him in this is love not that we have loved god but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins beloved if god so loved us we also ought to love one another our pastor often reminds us that we can be the most biblically literate well educated church in the world but if we don't have love we are missing it at the same time if all we have is love and we're not able to lovingly point people to truth and what the bible says we're going to be spinning our tires we must have biblical truth and christ-like love for the people around us paul wants timothy to do this his steadfastness this is the ability to stand firm in the midst of hardship you could also say endurance his persecutions this is obviously the hard part of being christian and if you're under the false pretense that giving your life to christ will bring will solve all of your problems you won't have financial issues anymore and all of your relationships will be super easy let me just point something out to you that is not true you will still face difficulty in fact we'll all face persecution for loving and living for christ and as a result his sufferings suffering is a result of persecution the difficulty that we walk through the hardship that we face that comes from the persecution of the world around us paul is reminding timothy of these things in the midst of his own persecution he's in a in a cell in rome waiting to literally lose his head for the sake of the gospel and paul is reminding timothy to be patient to love to be steadfast to endure persecution and suffering this is paul's spiritual muscle memory at work i'm sure you've kept up with philip rivers and the indianapolis cults the 44 year old father of 10 and grandfather who after like four years of being retired has returned to the nfl i promise all he is banking on is muscle memory that's he's just hoping this stuff all comes back to him and he spent his life training for it and he had a season that he didn't have to put those things into practice he didn't have to prepare himself to get hit by a linebacker he didn't have to try to get that pass right on point but he prepared for a long time so that when the time came he was ready to jump back in and be there and there may be a season for us that we don't face the hardship and the persecution but that doesn't mean that we don't continually prepare and get ourselves ready and equipped because it surely will come and 2026 may be a year
[22:34] that it comes for you we don't know what it holds it may be a year that is remembered forever we all have those years right when you think back to 2022 that was the year that this thing happened changed my life and 2026 may be that year for you are you preparing yourself verse 11 continues what happened to me at Antioch and Iconium and Lystra which persecutions I endured yet from them all the Lord rescued me Paul is going to name some very specific times that he faced persecution so that Timothy could bring these things to mind these are times that he lived these things out right in front of Timothy and he wants him to remember I'm not just saying this now I've been doing this follow my example time after time after time when persecution and suffering and hardship and difficulty come continue in what you know and you believe continue to hold to the faith continue to follow the example that I have set before you if you're interested you can read of his persecution in Antioch in Acts 13 50 in Iconium in Acts 14 1 through 5 in Lystra in Acts 14 19

Paul is a spiritual hero for Timothy setting a faithful example so my question for you is who are your spiritual heroes who are the people that you have around you that are helping you build your spiritual muscle memory who are the people that are older and wiser in the faith that are pouring into your life that you're watching their example and preparing yourself for whatever may come your way ready to respond biblically and faithfully to whatever life may throw and again I'd like to point out that I think this requires a personal relationship with those people that you can see them face to face and see the way that they're living their life so Paul has given these examples brought these specific times to Timothy's mind he's going to continue in verse 12 indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted all evil people and imposters will go from bad to worse deceiving and being deceived but as for you continue what you have learned and have firmly believed secondly
I want you to see that we must practice what we believe in order to be prepared for the future and what what the world may throw at us to be ready we must follow these faithful examples we must practice what we believe Paul doesn't just say that it's only leaders only Timothy who are going to face these difficulties no all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted and this doesn't only look like going to jail and facing death that's not only what persecution is many of us face persecution just through this Christmas season as you try to engage a family member or a friend in a conversation about the things of God or the things of the Lord and they make a demeaning comment about you or they brush you off or they won't listen to you because of the

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things that you believe they think less of you we all face this we all go through this so how are we responding how have we built up our own spiritual muscle memory in that moment do we return a harsh comment with another harsh comment breaking that fellowship and that relationship further or do we continue to be patient do we continue to love how do we put the things that we believe in to practice this doesn't mean we'll suffer all the time but it does mean that the way we live our lives should be obviously different than the world around us and that in and of itself will bring about persecution for us the temptation in these moments will always be to set our beliefs aside to act as the world acts to just try to blend in and go along with whatever's going on around us but Paul is stressing to Timothy don't stop don't give in don't stop practicing the things that you believe verse 13 gives us a progression of worldliness evil people and impostors will go from bad to worse deceiving and being deceived so naturally we can deduce that we should be the opposite of this our spiritual formation should be growing we should be abounding in our knowledge and understanding of who
God is we should be strengthened in biblical knowledge as we're discipled by others when we follow examples we should we should grow up in maturity as Ephesians 4 told us the fullness of Christ and I can attest to this that after difficulties and seasons of trials in my own life the next time something comes while on paper it may look more extreme and more difficult I've built up more spiritual muscle memory to deal with that situation and it comes with some ease as we get into it I'm not saying I'm perfect I'm not saying I've got it all figured out absolutely not but I'm saying I have lived in my own life and faced difficulties in my own life that have prepared me for the ones that came after and the Lord will do that in your life as well my wonderful gracious wife Chelsea signed up to coach our daughter
Lottie's basketball team she's four which means I get to be the assistant coach for a four-year-old basketball team I don't know if you've ever seen four-year-olds play basketball but it's kind of like a hybrid between basketball and football is really what it is there's I'm not gonna say there's no dribbling there's some dribbling there's a lot of fumbles there's some tackling that occurs a lot of swarming the ball you know they get out from around the line of scrimmage and that kid takes off down the court it's a lot of fun it's a lot of fun and I mean that it is fun but they're practicing they're getting ready for what's to come in the next stage it's not all polished they don't have it figured out they barely know what game they're there for or who's on the team or what goal to shoot at any of those things but they're practicing they're putting to practice the things that they know and they're honing their skills and they're getting better each game and one of these days they'll be five and six and seven and eight and they'll eventually make their way to high school and they'll understand the fundamentals of the game they'll understand how to go out there and the competition will be harder for them right now this is the easiest competition they'll ever face is four-year-olds however they will be more efficient later on as they face harder competition because they have put the things they know to practice and they're playing this game that's why if you're married in the room you can look back on your first married argument and you know that it is insignificant compared to the things that you deal with today but it felt like life or!
[30:56] it all hinges on this this one moment of whether we buy pickles in this house or not like this is it we're throwing down over this it's because we didn't have the skills to deal with it yet we hadn't practiced communication and conflict resolution yet so it felt difficult and hard the things we face today are much more difficult as a married couple but they come with more ease because we've put things to practice the things that we know and we hold to and Paul wants the same thing for Timothy to understand that he will face difficulty don't give up don't throw in the towel continue in what you have learned practice so often the trials that we face now are preparing us for something down the road or they're helping prepare someone else for something down the road it might be that the

Lord is using you your faithful example to prepare somebody else for their worst moment in 2026 it might be that the Lord is using this circumstance!
you're facing to prepare your own soul heart and mind for what you will face don't give up don't throw in the towel continue to practice the things that you have learned also I want to point out that when we do face persecution be encouraged because it means that you are faithfully following the Lord it means that you're saved it means that you have a hope and an eternity with Christ because if you weren't you'd be going from bad to worse deceiving and being deceived as this passage tells us the things that you face the persecution the hardship they are temporary be encouraged in that

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as hard as it is in the moment we have an eternal glory to look forward to if we know Christ as our Lord and Savior so when the difficulty comes don't stop don't!
falter and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching for reproof for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete equipped for every good work so Paul is going to bring Timothy's attention back to the upbringing that he had we see this in chapter one in verse five
I'm reminded of your sincere faith the faith that first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and how I am sure dwells in you as well what is the commonality between his early childhood examples and the example he has now in Paul it's that they stood on scripture when I look at the men who have faithfully discipled me throughout my life and have been an example for me the commonality between them is that they all faithfully stood on scripture they always return me back to God's word and in order to be prepared for the future to be prepared for what life may throw at us what we may face 2026 and beyond we must continually return back to scripture in verse 15 Timothy has been acquainted with these sacred writings the scripture the
[35:23] Bible for some time and it's truly amazing what the work of the word will do in your life and when times get tough Paul wants Timothy to return back to the Bible that he was taught through his life why because it says which are able to make you wise!

God fear or worry or doubt or sorrow! or self pity no in a difficult situation we need wisdom we need God's truth and I think that's exactly what Paul wants Timothy to see here I've been an example for you you've put these things to practice return to God's word so that way when times get tough and you are in prison and you are facing your own execution you know where your mind needs to lead you and the way that you ought to live don't look for the wisdom of man no Timothy go to Psalm 23 the Lord is my shepherd I shall not want verse 3 says he restores my soul and leads me in paths! Righteousness Why? For his name sake I think we often look at our trials in the wrong way I think that they have to do with us that we're the focal point of the things that happen in our life but we're not the way that we live the good times and the bad times when you've got family surrounding you for Christmas they all get to come to church with you time that you fall and roll your ankle in front of your nieces and nephews everything we do the way we respond is to glorify and honor the Lord and I'm really not kidding about that I could have fell and rolled my ankle and let a loose word out of my mouth instead I limped off in shame but we have to be equipped for every situation that we face primarily verse 15 the wisdom that the
Bible will bring begins with seeing our need for salvation and maybe that's where you are today perhaps you are trying to figure out who this Jesus guy is and who God is and why is it that all these people will show up at 10 o'clock on a Sunday when we should be sleeping in and doing more holiday stuff to come sing some songs together and listen to a 2,000 year old book read out loud why do we do this it's kind of strange that's because we are trying to put to practice the things that we believe and be reminded and encouraged in the truth of God's word this is a preview for the things to come when we get to heaven one day you see
God created the heavens and the earth and animals and plants and everything and he puts Adam and Eve in this world and he creates them in perfection his creation was good and very good Genesis tells us but Adam and Eve ushered sin into the world and our God is so holy and perfect and his standard is perfection that now we have a broken relationship with him now we face the consequences of our sin and that is death and eternal death but the good news of Christ is that he sent his son as we celebrated at Christmas time but he didn't just come and stay a baby he lived a perfect life and through persecution that he faced he went to the cross and he took a punishment that we deserve so that we one day could stand before God in righteousness having our sins paid for by the son of God that is the hope that we hold to no matter the circumstance we face no matter how hard things may get during our
[40:48] Christmas Eve service Kevin McDonald and his wife Amy and their family came and sat right back here and during the first of our Christmas Eve services I was standing back over against the wall we had just lit all of our candles and John began to lead us and all glory be to Christ and I watched Amy hold a candle for her husband and put her arm around him as he sang all glory be to Christ now that may not sound significant but Kevin right now faithful church member has stage four lung cancer is not doing well but he has the spiritual muscle memory to know how to respond in that moment to lead his family to church to have his family here under the preaching and teaching of

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God's word and he's going to sing with everything he has all glory be to

Christ Christ I talked to Amy yesterday on the phone and she was quick to admit that they need grace that they have difficult moments of course we all do but I can personally attest that while they are going through trial God has been ministering to me through them and I'm sure to many of you as they have faithfully faithfully faced this trial in their life I believe Kevin understands that this is temporary this is but a moment and he has all of eternity bask in the glory of his savior and that's the truth I hope you understand as well 2026 seems like a big deal you may have big plans there may be major milestones planned but whatever it is that you face
I pray that you are prepared for them that you have the spiritual muscle memory to react biblically as you ought to and that you will remember that these things are temporary so as we face this year do you have people in front of you that are setting an example for godly living that are leading you into Christ likeness or do you have people around you that are leading you into worldliness have you put the things that you claim to believe into practice are you living them out daily and where do you continually go to seek wisdom is it the man made theories and thoughts that are out there or is it god's word an everlasting source of wisdom and truth I pray that we will have a good 2026 but one that honors the lord above all let's pray father we come before you in the name of jesus and lord i ask that if there is anybody here who does not know you as their personal lord and savior that you would enlighten their minds make them wise to see that they have a need for salvation lord i pray that you would continue to bless us in our church in 2026 and i know that it will include difficulties and sorrow and pain but we also know that there will be moments of joy of happiness of rejoicing god i pray that we would remember that these moments are temporary that we have an eternal glory to look forward to all glory be to christ the king all glory be to christ we love you and we praise you we pray this in jesus name amen church family i love you so glad to see you today yours is missed you

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