The Bonds of Christian Fellowship

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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. I watched again this morning one of my favorite videos that I love to watch.

It's about a champion sprinter from England. His name is Derek Redman. He ran a while ago in the 1992 Games in Barcelona.
He had been a member of the 1991 English men's relay team that won the gold medal in the world championships.
As he prepared for the Olympics in Barcelona in 1992, he had run the fastest time in his 400-meter qualifying race. He had won his quarterfinal race in Barcelona.
And then as he was in the semifinal race preparing to advance to the medal race, he took his place in the fifth lane and he began to run with about 65,000 people watching him.
[1:17] And about three runners in front of him and 250 meters left to go, he made his move as he would typically do, ready to kick it into his high gear to pass the runners and win yet another race.

However, in an instant, he felt something in the back of his leg and he grabbed his hamstring as he had injured his hamstring at that point.
He crumpled to the ground and fell while all the other runners raced by him and finished his Olympic dreams in an instant vanished.
The attendants came to him to try to help him, but he pushed them away and stood up and began to hobble on his own toward the finish line, determined to make it there no matter how long it took him.
You can then see in the video a man make his way onto the track. An attendant tried to push him away, but this man refused to be deterred.
[2:25] It was Derek Redmond's father. Wearing a Nike hat, a white t-shirt and blue shorts, he makes his way to his son.

He puts his arm around him and says to his son, You don't have to do this, it's okay. And the son says, I'm finishing no matter what. And he says, in that case, we'll finish together.
And this grown man holds his grown man's son arm in arm, and the sprinter hobbles slowly, painfully, and tearfully to the finish line.
It's one of my favorite videos for a number of reasons. Part of it just connects with me as a father to sons, and part of it connects with me just for the desire and the will to complete what you said you would do no matter what.
Part of it appeals to me in a competitive spirit that says that you're fighting to be your best no matter what anybody else does. And part of it appeals to me as a believer, the picture that it's not just about how fast you can run.
[3:41] It's about helping other people to finish the race. That is a part of the Christian life, I think, that is often overlooked. That it's not just about you running well and you making it, but it is about helping other people, and if necessary, carrying other people even to the finish line.

There is something beautiful about seeing someone stand beside a person no matter what they're facing. There is something about watching sacrificial love in action that is just a lovely thing.
While the world certainly has its shares of iconic moments of heroism and even of friendship, there is nothing as beautiful and nothing as winsome as true Christian love in action.
Where you see two Christian friends who help each other and support each other and lean on each other, both determined not only to run their own race, but to help each other run and finish well.
Maybe it's just part of the gift of being on the other side of 50 years old now, but I think often about that reality of wanting to help other people finish well.

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[5:15] That's not a sad or depressing or morbid thought to me. I'm well aware that we're all going to, unless the Lord returns first to get us, we're all going to finish our race at some point, and I want so much not just to finish well, but to help other people finish well.

I want that for our church. I want that for our leaders. I want us to love each other, to lean on each other, to support each other, and to help each other finish the race.
Philippians 1, where we are in the early weeks of walking verse by verse, indeed word by word even through this beautiful New Testament letter, brings us today to verses 7 and 8, where Paul writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.
For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. He speaks here of the bonds of Christian friendship.
What is it that holds our hearts together? What is it that takes Christians different in so many ways, but united in Christ, and allows us to hold on to each other, to help each other, to support each other, to strengthen each other, so that we together would run the race and finish well.
[7:01] Make note of a few of the bonds he mentions here that holds our hearts together. Number one, write down the word affection from verse 7. Affection.

He says, it is right for me to feel this way about you. The language here is helpful for us. Paul is saying that there is something fitting.
There is something proper. Indeed, there is something right about the way he feels toward the people of this church at Philippi. It is right for me, he says, to feel this way.
He loves them. He cares for their well-being. He cares about their joy in Christ. He says there is something proper and right and fitting about feeling deep affection for each other.
I think it is helpful for us because we understand that we don't want to be a church that is simply an emotional place, just simply trying to stir up feelings because feelings can be deceiving.
[8:18] We want to be a church rooted in truth, precise in doctrine. However, do not ever forget that in its purest, truest form, those who know truth and those who believe doctrine absolutely feel a certain way toward each other.

There is an emotional component, an affection component to the body of Christ. It's not relationships built merely on emotion, but it's absolutely right and fitting, Paul says, that I would feel this way.
This is instructive for us because this reminds us that while there is teaching that absolutely should go on in our church and by God's grace, we've got a number of gifted teachers in every level and layer of our congregation and every ministry of our church, but we are not merely an academic intellectual place.
It's not what the church is. To be faithful, there must be teaching. There must be understanding. We are to rightly divide the word of truth, the Bible says, but you can stay home by yourself away from all human beings and read and learn and memorize and get smart.
That's not Christian friendship. It is right for me, he says, to feel this way. Now what he feels comes from, as we'll see in a moment, what they believe and what they know, but do not ever think the Christian life is merely about robotic intellectual pursuit.
[10:16] There's a connection with people. There's a bond of Christian friendship that should absolutely be a part of your life and a part of the church.

It is right for me to feel this way. Now it's interesting because in the language, the word to feel here carries the idea of thinking as well.
In other words, he's saying, I feel a certain way about you because of how I think of you. I think of you. I remember you. And based on how I think of you, I feel a certain way for you.
And the way I feel for you impacts the way I think of you. And that's exactly how the body of Christ should be. There are things that we think and hold and believe and know.
And there are things that we feel together. And those things are inextricably linked together. He says, it is right for me to feel this way about you all.
[11:19] Here's why. Because I hold you in my heart. But I hold you in my heart. In other words, he says, I carry you with me.

Wherever I go, I'm thinking of you. Whenever I read that verse, my mind goes back to the early days of Marcy and I being married.

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Next year is our 30th wedding anniversary. But I remember in the early days, we'd just been married, I would think maybe just even a few months. And we lived in South Oklahoma City.
And she had gone to Walmart and came home and brought groceries. And she had bought a sports magazine at Walmart and came home very excited.
So I have a gift for you. I have a gift for you. And I didn't know what it was. I don't know what I was expecting. But I guess I was thinking of something a little bit more than a magazine. But she gave me the magazine. And I thought, yay.
[12:25] A little bit of build up for a magazine. But thank you. And she said, Michael, I saw this when I was checking out at Walmart. And I was thinking, that's where the magazines are.

That makes sense. And she said, Michael, don't you see that I think of you wherever I go? And I was buying groceries and saw the magazine and I thought of you.
Well, the magazine took on a whole different meaning. Today, it hangs in my eye. No, I'm just kidding. It doesn't really. But her point to me was, we may be apart and I may be doing something as mundane as shopping for groceries.
But I'm thinking of you. I carry you in my heart. I think of you when I see things around. That's what Paul is saying here.
It's right for me to feel this way about you because I hold you in my heart. You may be hundreds of miles away.
[13:30] I hold you in my heart. Paul may be under house arrest, but I hold you in my heart. I may or may not ever get to physically be with you again depending on what happens with my life and in these legal proceedings.

But I hold you in my heart. And understand in the New Testament, the way the word heart there and the concept behind it is used. 2 Corinthians 4, it describes the mind.
Ephesians 6, it describes the emotions. 2 Corinthians 9, it describes the will. So when Paul says, I hold you in my heart in the fullness of how the New Testament speaks of this very word, he's saying, you're in my heart.
You're in my mind. You're in my emotions. You're a part of my will. You are, as one author said, the core and center. This friendship is always near and dear to me.
This isn't lukewarm acquaintance. This is deep affection that impacts Paul deeply. It is within the relationships of the local church that you should have these kinds of friendships.
[14:55] Deep, lasting friendships where there are people that you think of and you hold them in your heart. You think of them in your mind.

Your love and affection for them impacts you. And maybe it's people you see every day. Then maybe it's others you see once a week.
Or maybe there are other believers outside of the local assembly that you may only see once a year. Or it may have been years since you've seen them. But there is a bond that connects you and holds you together.
And you carry them in your heart. That's important. You can't get that from a distance.
You have to get that in relationship. You can't get that merely from reading a theology textbook. That happens when you allow your life to be intertwined with other people.
[15:57] Genuine, deep affection. Let me show you a second bond that connects believers together. common salvation. Common salvation.

Back to verse 7. It is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart for you are all partakers with me of grace.
Our Christian fellowship exists because we are all saved by grace through faith. And we need to remember that, church. if you're ever tempted to look down on somebody, if you're ever tempted to think that you're above somebody, if you're ever tempted to allow cliques to form within the church or within your Sunday school class or within a ministry team, just stop and remember we are all partakers of grace.
All sinners. All deserving of judgment. And if in Christ, all saved by grace. If we don't remember our common salvation, it will cripple unity.
True biblical unity. Ephesians 4, unity of the faith. True biblical unity exists because we recognize that we are all sinners deserving of judgment and in amazement have been brought together through the grace of God and He alone has covered our sin and united us as a family.

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[17:35] Never forget this. So that person sitting two rows in front of you, three chairs over from you, the section behind you, you look at them and you say, I recognize their face, I don't really know their name.

I've never seen them before. I see them every week but I don't know who they are. We probably don't have much in common anyway. I'm older, they're younger. I've got little kids, they're retired. I'm a new member, they've been here for years. I've been here forever, I don't know these people, they're brand new. All these things in your mind that can tend to say there's just no reason to connect with them.
I've got, I don't know them, that's weird, that's awkward, I don't want to introduce myself, maybe they've been here a long time anyway, besides I know enough people, I'm fine. All those things that tend to cause us to be comfortable without building relationships need to be put away as we remind ourselves there is something right and fitting about deciding and choosing to build purposeful relationships with those in the church because we have a common salvation and if that's true, we are part of the family of God.
And that should drive us to deep personal relationships. If the same father, then a part of the same family. Jude 3 speaks of our common salvation.
[19:14] Philippians 1 says it this way, we are all partakers of grace. We have affection with each other that bonds us together because we share a common salvation for all who are in Christ.

Number three, another bond is lasting support. Lasting support. He says, you are all partakers of me of grace.
Look at the end of verse 7. both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.
Let's look at this in two parts of the kind of support that we should give each other. First, he says, in my imprisonment.
You might write down in pain. We want to give support to each other when we are in pain. Specifically for him, it's his imprisonment.
[20:15] For us, it may not be physical incarceration, but in the painful days, in the painful seasons of life. There are those who are friends when it's simple or when it's easy or when it's convenient.

But when life is hard, sometimes friendships are very scarce. People love to be friends with somebody when it's good for them.
But what about when it's costly? The church at Philippi, Paul says, you stood with me. I hold you in my heart. We are partakers of grace.
And you have stood with me in my imprisonment, in my time of pain. They not only stood with him and prayed for him and loved him, they sent resources and collected offerings for him to minister to him.
They gave even out of their poverty to help him. We are to support each other in pain. the book of Romans tells us that we are to rejoice with those who rejoice and we are to weep with those who weep.
[21:48] Christians grieve. And when we grieve, we need each other. there's no such thing in this world as Christians being exempt from pain.

In fact, it is a very real thing that claim in the name of Christ may increase your pain, increase your danger. And when it's a season of pain, the body of Christ clings to Christ and clings to each other. this is always true. It's been very clear in our minds this week. Just a few days ago, September 11th, if you are 20 years old or older, you'll never forget that day.
you know where you were. For me, I was getting into my car to come to work. I turned on the sports radio station and it had national news and I thought this is not good.
if you're too young, you've heard about it but if you're old enough to remember it, it's something you will never forget.
[23:23] And sometimes the grief we feel is like that. It's a national tragedy. It's something that shakes us. I remember just like you do if you're old enough, hearing about all the different things happening in the planes and the towers and the buildings and you just wonder how much more is there to come.

Is this over this morning? Is something else happening tonight? Is something else happening tomorrow? Is something else happening next week? And just that uncertainty of what's happening and in times of national tragedy, we grieve but we grieve together.

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Saw it this week in the assassination of Charlie Kirk. People seeing things that human eyes ought not have to see and thoughts and emotions that humans ought not have to bear and you just think to yourself, is this the world in which we live?
that's why Jesus said in this world you will have tribulation but be of good cheer because I have overcome the world.
If you have this idea that you can go to church enough or read your Bible enough or be nice enough that there will be no tragedy or grief to enter your life that's just not true.
[25:01] And it's a terrible terrible thing to see someone lose their life for doing nothing more than speaking and it just makes you sick to your stomach and it makes you angry and it makes you just think to yourself what is going on?

And there are some things that we need to know and there are some things we need to believe and there are some places we run to and hope but there is also a time to just grieve together and just mourn the reality of sin and to just feel what you should feel toward the display of such wickedness and evil that should move you and sometimes it's not national tragedy sometimes it's personal tragedy we've experienced that in the last week as a church too two long time members of our church in the last week have gone to be with the
Lord we had the funeral service on Friday for Terry Robertson and next week for Leslie Monholland not famous not internationally known deaths not covered on the local news but people who are known and loved and a part of a family and we grieve for their husbands we grieve for their families and it's true and we should comfort ourselves to say that as believers they're with the Lord and it's true the Holy Spirit will help their husbands to carry on in this next phase of life and we believe that and we mean that but there's also a time where we just stand next to someone who is hurting and grieving and just grieve and hurt with them there's a part of the
Christian life that just says I recognize life can be extremely painful and life can be very difficult and sometimes it's national tragedies that you would give anything to get out of your mind for a moment but you can't get away from and other times it's personal loss and your heart just aches for people who are going through that and there are things that we know and those truths are very important but there's also a sense of friendship that says we believe the same things and I'm going to put my arm around you and be here for you while we remind ourselves of the truths that together we hold true support true friendship is experienced in days of pain Christians grieve
Christians grieve often but we do not grieve alone but that support is not only in days of pain secondly it's also in the preaching of the gospel he says you've been with me in my imprisonment that's the pain and here's the second half the defense and confirmation confirmation of the gospel both of these are legal terms defense and confirmation are both legal terms the word defense here is the root of which we get our English word for apologetics it's a legal term that means to defend your position in an argument he says as I make a defense for the gospel as I explain the gospel as I defend the truth of the gospel you stood with me and in my confirmation also a legal term this one meaning to give a guarantee of something you stood with me as I declared the truth of the gospel as I spoke of the guarantee of salvation in Christ as I spoke of the exclusivity of the gospel as I spoke of the reality that those who are in Christ are safe and secure in him you stood with me in my pain and in my preaching when I was grieving and when I was defending when I was hurting and when I was declaring
[30:14] I knew I could count on you because of your support in any season of life whether it be days of pain or days of gospel proclamation I knew you would be with me this is the kind of things you don't get just because you go to seminary or have a degree or read textbooks this is what you experience because you have people and lives that have shaped you and are a part of you when relationships are tested by fire and people stand with you in your pain and in your preaching enduring friendships are formed and it is a beautiful part of the body of Christ and friends this is why it's never sufficient just to attend attending church attending worship is a good thing but friends it's why it's not enough to just physically show up and sit and stand and sing and open a bible and leave there are human relationships that in

God's design are a part of your life to help you in days of pain and help you in days of ministry and these are so important so important there are people who believe what we believe and within the walls of this church there is great encouragement and I'm thankful for that but rest assured those who don't believe what we believe will be happy to do whatever it takes and whatever they can do to hurt harm or discredit or attack and we as the body of Christ want to help each other run well and

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listen to me as a preacher of the gospel I understand and I've had my share of people who aren't believers and want to take shots and all kinds of things
I wear the scars of a little bit of that but let me help you understand this is true for sure those of you who go to work tomorrow go to some of you very hostile places and those of you who go to schools go to very hostile places and I get that and there are some struggles and battles I face as a preacher of the gospel but tomorrow when I come to work I'm going to start my work week Monday morning surrounded by about 15 people around a conference table reading the bible out loud people who love Jesus who love me who I love them and we are co-laborers in the gospel for some of you you start your day tomorrow morning in a very dark difficult hostile place and together we encourage each other and we fight for each other and we grieve with each other and we run with each other in days of pain and in days of preaching in days of loss and in days of gospel ministry there is lasting support within the body of
Christ the fourth bond that holds us together is a relationship that is centered on Christ the relationship centered on Christ verse 8 for God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus he says the Lord knows what's in my heart more than anything else I can express and he knows these relationships are so deep so lasting so tested so true he says I long for you with the and the word in English here is affection in its root in the original text here it refers to the bowels the place of deep feeling of deep emotion of longing it's a word that referred to your stomach your gut it's just what you feel deep on the inside
I long with you with the affection he says of Christ and this is not a mere intellectual thing he says I feel this I feel this deep in my body for for some of you when you got married you'll remember the exact moment particularly husbands if you were up at the front you'll remember when those doors opened and the first time on your wedding day you saw your bride in her dress what'd you feel you felt in your throat didn't you you just felt it right there you you felt it in your heart because your heart was racing you you felt it in your stomach as you had nerves and knots and butterflies and you felt it even in your hands as they got sweaty and you felt it in your legs and you got kind of weak and that's just that's what you feel that's the deep affection that's the whole body saying
[35:54] I love this person and yes you know her name and you know her birth date and you know things about her and facts about her but in that moment it's not just an intellectual knowledge it's the affection you feel and for others that have had the privilege to have a baby you hold your baby for the first time and you know their weight and you know their length and you know something about their name or their you know the dates and the data but in that moment it's not just about intellectual knowledge it's what you feel and where did you feel it when you held your baby for the first time when you felt it in your gut and your heart and your throat and your mind it was just all over Paul says I long for you with the affection the place of deep seated emotion this is what you cannot get by merely reading learning studying memorizing all those things are essential but they're not sufficient there is a feeling that you have

I don't even know that I should probably say this but like if if some if some church calls or contacts me and they're talking about positions or opportunities or whatever there is a there is a feeling for you that's not replicated or replaced anywhere else the Lord is free and the Lord moves members and pastors I'm not saying about anybody else I'm just simply saying that part of what the Lord has done in our heart as a family is is just given us a love and a heart and a passion for you and you just feel it deep it's why if I'm gone on a Sunday I feel something missing I'm at church and I may be preaching and I may be with people that are that are kind but but there's something you just feel when it's your family and church as much as we want to train and equip and help you to know the word and be able to defend the word and explain the gospel things are so important there are also relationships that are absolutely meant to be a part of your
Christian life and you should feel that God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus I don't know what word jumps out to you in verse 8 I think probably the word affection is the most important description in verse 8 but it's the little English word translated here all that I find a bit challenging do you I long for you all and this is close to the New Testament gets to y'all I mean this is like this is us I long for y'all I long for you all church don't write people off within the family if there's people in the church you are at odds with as much as depends on you live in peace I understand all relationships are two way streets
I get that there may be people you're at odds with and you've tried and you can't do anything else I get that but do feel the weight of him saying I yearn for you all I love all of you he says I feel for all of

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you college students have friends that aren't in college middle schoolers connect with people that aren't in middle school adults know somebody younger than you you need somebody younger than you because if your friends are all your age no one can help you move anything have friends with young backs and if you're young have friends older than you because you can't afford anything it's too expensive old people get some guys with a back young people get someone with some cash be together in relationships because you need each other you need each other don't just talk to people like you don't just have relations with people just like you you ought to have some people that you're friends with and you say you know what they're kind of weird aren't they I love them they're so different than me I love them they have such different tastes and preferences than I do
I love them they help me follow Christ because of that I have affection for all of them he says so Christians aren't the only ones with friends unbelievers have friends unbelievers can help each other but nothing is as beautiful as deep or as lasting as those whose friendship is rooted in Christ entrance into the family of God is only for those who know Christ but that invitation into the family is open for you today salvation is found only in Christ but it exists for all who would come to him my prayer for you today is that if you don't know Christ that you would have peace with the Father through the work of Christ the Son having your sin forgiven by the work Jesus did on the cross for you and let the reality of the cross and the empty tomb drive you to a place of faith confession and belief and unite you with others who too have been saved by grace through faith and share a common salvation in Christ and help each other finish well
[42:58] Lord we thank you for your word this morning and pray that you would use it through your Holy Spirit even now to strengthen and to help to serve to convict and to encourage we love you and thank you for every good gift you've given to us in the name of your son we pray amen we invite you back tonight five o'clock our evening service Nahum chapter two we pray we'll see you then God bless you you're dismissed love you church you're you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you

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