Life in the Body

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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.!

Notice how both these passages have so much similarity. Namely, that these are things that we do with each other.
Love one another, 1 Peter 4 says. Show hospitality to one another. Serve one another. Chapter 4 in 1 Thessalonians 18, encourage one another.
Chapter 5 verse 11, encourage one another. So you just cannot escape this continual theme in the New Testament that the church is to be connected to one another.
And as we are connected, we are to have a ministry of encouragement. But we don't encourage each other on just trivial things.
[1:26] We encourage each other based on the things we know from God's Word. Because we know that believers are going to be with the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 4, we encourage each other.

Because as we think about the day of the Lord, the end times, chapter 5, 1 to 11, and remember that there is a way we're supposed to live, there's a way that we're supposed to think and act, we encourage each other to do that.
And so this is not the kind of worldly encouragement that just tells you to keep on keeping on. This is a biblical encouragement that tells you, in light of what we know, there's a way that we live. There's a way Christians behave. There's a way Christians think. And we are to not only know those things, but encourage one another in those things.
So it's no stretch to say that biblically, you really can't encourage someone in the Lord if you don't know His Word. Because the encouragement we are to give is an encouragement from Scripture.
[2:37] But it's also just as fair to say that if you do know the Scripture, you're not obeying it if you're not using what you know to build the faith of other people and to strengthen them.

And for some, that feels intimidating because we tend to major on the things that we don't know, or we tend to be intimidated by the parts of the Scripture that we don't fully understand, and so we just stay pretty quiet.
But let me just remind you, every single person who teaches the Bible is a student who is still learning. And so if you're not a teacher and you feel intimidated just by passing on what you know to your children, or to your grandchildren, or to those that may be in a Sunday school class, or to other people, you may feel called to disciple them, but you feel nervous because there's things you don't know.
Let me just remind you, all of us are still learning. None of us have it all figured out. I can remember sitting as a young child in church and wondering, what is the age or what is the life stage where you know everything about the Bible and you're just kind of done and you just kind of teach it the rest of your life?
Well, it ain't 51, I'll tell you that, because I've not hit it. And I don't think that I will. We're all still learning. So we encourage each other based on what we know about the Lord, what He's revealed to us in His Word, and don't let any excuse or alibi get you out of the game of working to build and encourage each other's faith.
[4:24] Not your past, not your weaknesses, not the things that you don't know. Learn, be in the Word, and encourage one another with these words.

So part of why I wanted to spend most of January in 1 Peter 4 is because, on Sunday mornings, is because it is just a perfect complement to where we are in 1 Thessalonians.
Both of them deal with life in the body. How churches, how Christians are to live with each other. How we are to minister with each other.

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How we are to walk with the Lord, with each other. And so, our passage tonight, verses 12 to 15, builds on that theme. How are we to walk together as we pursue the Lord?
Verse 12 says, We ask you brothers to respect those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.
[5:35] Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good, and to one another, and to every one. It's always been interesting to me when you read the New Testament, particularly as one who is a pastor in a church, because you're always looking to say, what does the Bible clearly call us to do?
Because you want to make sure you're doing what the Scripture calls us to do. And it's always interesting to me how the Bible is clear on what we are to be focused on as a congregation.
But there's a lot that is not said that people like to argue about. The Bible does not tell us how long a sermon should be. The Bible doesn't tell us how many songs we should sing.
The Bible doesn't tell us the only way or the exact way that you structure a congregational service. It tells us things to do.
[6:51] It tells us to sing. It tells us to preach the Word. It tells us to pay attention to the public reading of Scripture. There are things it tells us to do. But there are a lot of things that are not spelled out.

But one of the things that it does spell out is something that is often overlooked, and admittedly by many, often abused, that I think is part of what helps the church not argue over things that the Bible has not dictated to us.
Verse 12 specifically says, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord. So when we think about life in the body, just a couple of things tonight.
First, he says to honor your leaders. We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord, and they admonish you.
One of the things your leaders should do, one of the things your pastors should do, is it's very clear, just using the words here, they are to labor among you. They labor because the work of shepherding is hard work.
[8:09] The New Testament has four words it uses to speak of leaders in the church. One word is translated as elder, speaks of spiritual maturity and wisdom. One word is translated as overseer, which speaks of spiritual oversight.

One word is translated as pastor, which speaks of serving the flock. And another is leader, which speaks to providing spiritual direction.
All of these words essentially are interchangeable, and it should be a true, accurate description of those who are leaders in the church.
Elders, overseers, pastor, leaders. These are men that the Lord puts in churches, and they are tasked to labor among you.
They should be hard workers. Those who pastor God's people should be faithful, diligent workers.
[9:13] In fact, the word here used, to labor, is a word that means to work to the point of exhaustion. There are a couple of things for me that are just inexcusable to me for men who are pastors.

One are men who continually make excuses, and the other are men who are lazy. Those two things are just completely antithetical to what the New Testament teaches leaders in a church should be. Those who are going to serve God's people and lead God's people are to be men who are hard, diligent workers. Not men who make excuses.
Not men who are lazy. Not men who are looking for the easy way out. They need to be men who work hard.
I'll just give you a little bit of real-life example of this. Joey's been with us for seven years, eight years, one of those two.
[10:21] But before he came on our staff, he was in our church. And you might blush a little bit here, so you can feel free to tune me out, as you often do. But he was an intern.

He was a volunteer intern. Emphasis on the volunteer. And he came to me and said, hey, I'd love to kind of shadow you for a summer. I'd love to learn what you do. And he said, I don't need to be paid.

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And I said, okay, you got the job. You had me at free. And I knew he was smart. I knew he was gifted. But I unashamedly wanted to see if the boy could work.
And so he had a task that summer that was reading and writing papers and teaching and writing sermons and letting me critique his sermons and then going to visit senior adults in their home and all kinds of things.
And he didn't get a paycheck for it. And the fact he didn't get a paycheck for it meant nothing to me in terms of what kind of quality he was expected to do.
[11:26] Because if he is going to be called by God to be a pastor, he's got to learn to work hard. I don't mean learn as if he couldn't already do it. But he had to work hard.

No excuses. No laziness. Now, the same thing is true for all of our staff and for so many of our key leaders who aren't paid, but are leaders in our church.
I'm just using that as an example. But I'm telling you, I unashamedly that summer, I wanted to see how far I could push him. I wanted to see how far I could stretch him.
I wanted to see at what point would his personal commitment to excellence begin to wane. I wanted to see if he would say, you know what, I'm not even getting paid for this, so I didn't read the end of that book you asked me to.
I didn't do that paper you asked me to write because after all, it's just a volunteer. I wanted to see if he was trustworthy. I wanted to see if he made excuses. And I wanted to see if he would work hard.
[12:31] And that was 10 years ago. He's been on our staff now for seven or eight years. Do you get paid? I think you get paid now.

Yeah. But you know what? He wouldn't be if 10 years ago for free, he didn't work hard.
You don't let a paycheck or a title dictate your commitment. It's the Lord that dictates our desire to serve with excellence.
And for all of the men who are on our pastoral team, they're hard workers. And if they weren't, it wouldn't work. And we've got key leaders in our staff and so many in our church who in a volunteer basis teach and serve and do all kinds of administration who serve with excellence and with hard work, not because of a title, not because of a paycheck, but because Christ is worthy of our best.
But there is a higher accountability for those who are recognized as leaders of the flock. And so, the scripture says here, we ask you brothers to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord.
[13:54] The leaders, the pastors of a church, depending on the passage, whether they are called elders or overseers or pastors or leaders, their responsibility is to work hard.

And then, this next part that's a little bit touchy sometimes, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord.
Over you. Now, I don't want to re-preach what I've already said this morning, but I need to say it because we need to make sure we understand what this does and does not say. There is nothing about a title that means that somebody always gets their way.
That cannot be the way that it works. When your leaders make decisions, the filter that runs through cannot be who's demanding their own way.
It has to be what do we think is best for our people. We just recently had a staff meeting where we were looking at some things for the next 12 months and having to make some decisions.
[15:05] Not decisions we can chapter and verse. Chapter and verse decisions are easy. What does the Bible say? Let's do it. Let's go to lunch. That's easy. What's hard is when you can't chapter and verse it, but you've been tasked to provide oversight and make decisions that are going to influence and affect a lot of people.

And so, what I want those meetings to be, I want everyone to speak. I want to hear everybody's opinion. I don't want people to be yes men or yes women. I don't want people to be intimidated.
I want people to speak, but I also want people to think through not just what's convenient for you or the ministry you predominantly oversee, but what's best for all of our people.
And so, we think about those things. And if we make this decision, how does this impact our adults? And how does this impact those who work with our preschoolers? And how does this impact our building?
And how does this impact our volunteers? And if we cancel this or add this, how is that going to work for the entire church? Because if we're not leading like that, then you shouldn't follow anything that we say.

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[16:22] There's just no such thing in the Bible as we're the pastors. This is what we're doing. Get out of the way. That's completely contrary to Scripture.

And I don't care how many years experience a group has. I don't care how many degrees are among the group. If the mentality is that the people in the church are just pawns for the leaders to move around in some organizational chart, and that's all it is, that is completely antithetical to biblical pastoring.
Yet the word does say to respect those who are over you in the Lord. Well, in what sense are the pastors or the leaders over you?
In the sense of their responsibility is to teach you and to love you and to serve you and to guide and to protect. We're not the Holy Spirit.
There is a Holy Spirit. It's not us. You don't need us to tell you a list of movies you can watch and movies you can't. You don't need us to tell you what you can spend your money on and what you can't.
[17:32] We're not the Holy Spirit. But what we should do is what Scripture says where Paul says, imitate me as I imitate Christ.

That should be the mindset of those who labor in the church and leadership to live in such a way that you would imitate us not because it's our opinion but because as you imitate us you're imitating Christ.
And if your leaders aren't imitating Christ then that's a huge problem. And so when I'm gone and someone else is preaching or someone else is preaching on a Sunday night when I'm here you should absolutely have the assurance that whoever is standing in this pulpit to preach is someone who has worked hard and labored hard and studied hard and has a desire to serve you well.
It's one of the things I try to tell young men that I'm discipling or meeting with in ministry. Don't stand up to preach and try to hit home runs. Just serve the people.
Love them study God's word and serve them. Don't hit grand slams don't try to preach power sermons that people will never forget because then all the emphasis is on you just love the people enough to serve them and serve them by leading them in the truth of God's word.
[19:06] So when scripture says we ask you brothers to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord this does not mean that the pastors of a church are the bosses or the dictators or that it's our way or the highway.

Our responsibility is to be in the Lord loving you as Christ has called us to studying to show ourselves approved.
Men who would pray and be bold but humble honest but compassionate and seek to serve in such a way and labor in such a way that you trust that if we are asking you to do something it's through the mindset of what we truly believe is for your spiritual good.
And yet even if our heart is right we're not inerrant. Which is why the leaders of the church have got to be men who are constantly in God's word.
I think you would all be greatly encouraged if you attended one of our staff meetings to know what we do and what we don't do.
[20:42] Our staff meetings we start by we read through books of the Bible. We're in 1 Timothy I think right now. Reading is that right? 1 Timothy? So we start 1 Timothy and we just read out loud for about 10 or 15 minutes and then we have somebody who leads a time of Bible study.

We go over a few things if there's things we need to do. We typically have men who then we zoom in preachers or leaders from all across the nation that talk about ministry and preaching and we're challenging each other we're pushing each other we're talking about things from a biblical standpoint and trying to honestly evaluate what we're doing and the reason why is because if we ever think that our position or our title is sufficient to just say do what we say then we need to be removed.
The leaders you follow you follow in the Lord. Men who are walking with Jesus. Men who are studying His Word.
And men who labor among you. working to the point of exhaustion the text would mean here. Labor among you. Labor with you. Labor beside you. And so when the Bible says that we are to honor our leaders this is not saying that somebody gets a degree they're the boss do whatever they say.

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[22:21] right? This is saying that you're praying for the Lord to raise up godly men who know the Bible but are studying the Bible who love you who are serving you who have your spiritual good as their desire and the glory of Christ ruling above all things and that as you imitate them and follow them you become more like Jesus.

That's very important. important. You've heard me say before when our staff meets there are times we vote and I lose votes and I should lose votes and there's times where we're talking about a certain thing and John gives an opinion and we listen to it and it's good and we vote and John loses the vote and he should lose a vote because he's not an errant and there's times we're talking about things and Jeff says I really think we ought to do this and we listen and we talk and we go back and forth and we're saying what's best for our church and we've got to take a vote we've got to figure out what's the best way to serve the church and Jeff should lose some votes so should Jeremy so should Joey because if we're talking he's there's not any one person's opinion who ought to rule the day and so

I'm preaching to me I'm preaching to our pastors you the congregation yes but it's not as if our job is to tell you to follow us blindly my goodness don't ever be in a church where that's the idea you respect your leaders in the Lord and the understanding here is that those men are working hard and they're working hard as God would have us this is exactly what 1 Peter 5 says shepherd the flock of God among you as God would have you if your pastors aren't doing as God would have it then the church is a mess they must be men who are shepherding as God would have you so how is it how does life in the body work well you you honor your leaders because they are laboring among you they are over you in the Lord and admonish you admonish that that's not always easily done people don't like to be admonished but but follow his logic here follow this holy spirit inspired thought process if the pastor does not admonish the congregation if the men who are serving and leading the church if they never admonish if they never correct if they never bring conviction to your soul through biblical instruction it's because either they're afraid to do that and they're just people pleasers or it's because the congregation won't tolerate men teaching the truth and they just want men to teach what they want either way that works that church is dead where you have pastors who their greatest desire in life is just to always be liked they'll never be faithful to teach the hard things then where you have a congregation who won't tolerate that and they just you guys may know there's churches that are just known to run people off every couple of years you know those churches some of you have been in those churches every couple years they just run guys off well either way the pastor who refuses to speak what's true or the church that church is dead it is the biblical task of the leaders in the church to admonish pastor's tone should never be hateful pastor's words should never be hateful pastor's motive should never be preaching out of sinful anger or worldly anger or fleshly anger but it is to preach the truth it's one of the many reasons why

I believe in the study diet of preaching verse by verse word by word because you're just forced as the preacher to teach on all kinds of things there are some subjects that come up when you preach verse by verse through books of the Bible that frankly I would never pick that subject just randomly but as you teach the book of everything that's there I don't worry any about preaching what's true I don't worry about if someone's going to like it that's a dead end street those of you who teach Sunday school classes and are in charge of handing the word if you pull back on what's true because your greater priority is just will people like it then you're making the applause of man your idol I don't find myself ever worrying about that part of it

I do want to make sure though that in any admonishment or any teaching or any correction I do care a lot about is my heart right and I'm a sinner like you I've got to deal with my own sin I'm going to deal with my own shortcomings with my own weaknesses and I'm not a robot so I've got to do work in my own heart my own soul to make sure that even if I'm teaching things that are hard from the text that my heart is in a place of grace and patience and love and doesn't always work perfectly that way but those who are to be leaders in the church you honor them because they work hard among you because they're leading you to Christ likeness because they're teaching you and convicting you and look at verse 13 and esteem them very highly in love because of their work this is the kind of relationship that should be in the church that you esteem your leaders you esteem your pastors because of their work you want to know that your pastors are working hard you ought to know that you need know that it needs to be evident that men who are handling

[29:25] God's word have spent time in prayer and spent time in studying are working hard among you when back to joy for just a minute when joy was he was working full time when he was starting

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in full time seminary I told him I said look you want to work at the church you want to go to seminary no complaining and I said you can complain to your wife that's okay and I think I said maybe your mom but that's it I don't want to hear you complaining about how hard it is this is what you called to don't be lazy and not prepared and tell your youth well I've had a really busy week don't be unprepared and telling your youth workers how hard this is the path you've chosen do it with excellence do it with diligence do it with humility and no complaining complain to your wife no problem cry to your wife no problem don't cry to me

I'll help you I'll encourage you I'm not holding joy when he cries I didn't take any promise to death do his part because what I want him to understand is that what you've signed up for is hard and to serve God's people when you look at your leaders you ought to be able to say I esteem them highly because they work hard this should be hard we're handling the word of God and we're imperfect at it this should be hard we ought to read and we ought to study and we ought to learn and we ought to double and triple check and we ought to be doing everything we can to make sure that we are making decisions in a way that honors Christ as best we can this is hard work but I don't say that to complain

I say it to say you should expect your leaders to work hard don't hear me say that pastoring is hard work so feel sorry for us I'm saying the opposite I'm saying we have agreed to do this and been called by God to do this you ought to expect that we're working hard lazy pastor is an oxymoron shouldn't fit together so how does the church operate in this one brief paragraph there's four things we're just getting to this first one tonight but you honor your pastors because of their character you honor your pastors because of how they work and you honor your pastors because they are serving you in the Lord and we've got a lot of young people in our church who one day will be leaders in a church we've got some men in our youth group who one day will be pastors in a church we've got some younger guys among us who one day will serve on a pastoral team at churches and what I want to say to those gentlemen

I don't even know who they all would be tonight but if they're here I want to say that if this is what God has called you to he has called you to a life that is hard work and immensely joyful but don't be running around complaining about how hard life is because I'll tell you who has a hard life the single mom who's working taking care of her kids and comes to church and teaches Sunday school the business owner who works on Wednesday till six o'clock runs home and grabs something to eat and brings his kids to Awana while he goes to sing in the choir that's hard the retired person who while other people are doing whatever they want has chosen instead to spend their later years studying and working and preparing and going to teach

Sunday school to children most of whom are too young to understand how much of a gift that really is to them you see in the body of Christ if we're doing it right we're all working hard and I can't stand to hear pastors complain about how hard they work one because they should work hard two as if they're the only ones in the church who are!

[34:10] you know many people taught the Bible this morning dozens! dozens and dozens and dozens and dozens of people taught the Bible this morning many of whom will get up tomorrow and go to a job or begin the work of taking care of their home or a combination of the two no recognition no paycheck not building a career or resume just serving Jesus so I tell our guys all the time I want our church to be a place where hard working men on our pastoral team come and stay and I want this to be a place where a lazy man gets run over I don't want a lazy man to feel at home here I want guys to come and work and that you will follow them not blindly not because of their title not because of their education but because they love you and they are in the word

I want men who will say that it's the joy of their life to serve you that's the first part of life in the body I didn't get as far as I wanted to because I get frustrated with people in my profession and I'm preaching to myself because I know my own heart and you don't owe it to me to do anything I say unless what I'm saying to you is from the word but see that's what unifies the church is when we all say we love each other we trust each other let's open our Bibles and make sure what we're reading and saying is true because the Bible teaches us we're all sinners all in need of God's grace and in the end that's what unifies us one Lord one Savior one faith one baptism and so we partner together to pursue

Christ with all that we have let me ask if you would what unifies what unifies or what unifies or what unifies or what unifies or what unifies or what unifies or what unifies or what unifies or what unifies or what unifies or what unifies or what unifies or what unifies or what unifies or what unifies or what unifies or what

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