The Life of the Pastor

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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. Turn with me to 1 Thessalonians chapter 3.

! And so we're going to divide it up and we'll do a little bit tonight.
Next Sunday I'll be here Sunday morning and I'll be flying out as soon as morning service is over and I'll be in Los Angeles next week, not this coming week but the next week, teaching and preaching there at the Masters University and Seminary.
And so I'll be here in the morning, be out the evening, and then the next Sunday night be back to finish up, Lord willing, chapter 3. But as we've looked in chapter 2 at the marks of a faithful Christian in verses 13 to 16, we looked at the marks of a faithful shepherd last week in verses 17 to 20, chapter 3 is just a continuation of those thoughts.
It really, I think, is a beautiful part of this letter that helps us think about what ministry is all about. And when we look specifically at the life and the ministry of a pastor, which is what I've, in my mind, called this theme of chapter 3, it's not limited just to those who are vocationally pastors.
[1:36] It would include us, but we're really talking about the life and the ministry of all who are seeking to lead and serve God's people, however and wherever that may be.

Chapter 3 walks us through Paul's relationship with the church in Thessalonica. It shows in chapter 3 the reality, the good and the bad, of life of those who shepherd God's people.
Chapter 3, for me, I feel really intensely in a personal way because this is Paul writing about his love and his care for this specific church.
Paul obviously has a heart for what God is doing in other places too, but in this letter we're reading about his specific love and passion and interest and concern for this local church, and that resonates with me because I care about what God is doing all around the world.
I've got many friends that pastor in many other churches that I pray for often and care deeply for what is going on in those churches. But of course, this local church here is where my heart, my life, and my soul resides.
[2:50] And so when I read chapter 3, I feel this in a very personal way. But I think as we walk through it this week and in a couple of weeks when we pick it back up, I think you'll see that while perhaps the direct word would be to those who are pastoring God's people and leading the churches, I think you'll find many implications and applications for those of you who teach, who disciple, those of you who are parents, those of you who are grandparents that are seeking to raise up and train up others in the things of the Lord.

But I think the very natural implications will be clear. So as we walk through chapter 3, we're going to do it through the lens of the pastor of the church in terms of the people that the men the Lord raises up to shepherd God's people.
This is really a continuation of what we looked at at the end of chapter 2 when we looked at the faithful marks, the things that should be true of those who lead God's church.
And building upon that, we look at the ministry of a pastor. But again, as we do that, I want you to also be thinking through the ramifications of this in your own life.
The people that you shepherd. The children you're raising at your home. The grandchildren you're striving to influence for Christ. The Sunday school class that you teach.
[4:23] The discipleship group that you're a part of. So first, let's look at the pastor's pain. The pastor's pain. Chapter 3, verse 1, he addresses this. Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind Athens alone.

And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions.

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For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction.
Just as it has come to pass and just as you know. It's interesting because, remember, the chapter breaks are imported into the text.
We know that. Paul did not write with chapter and verse. He wrote a letter. Long, long after Paul wrote this, the text is divided into chapter and verses.
[5:28] And that's important because if you look at the end of chapter 2, verse 19 and verse 20, he's speaking of the hope and the joy, the crown that the church is for him.

And verse 20, you are our glory and joy. Paul is saying there is so much joy in his heart, joy in his life as he thinks about this church in Thessalonica.
Now, if we think in terms of a hard break between chapter 2 and chapter 3, we're going to think of a total new subject.
You shouldn't think of it that way. Again, if you said to Paul, chapter 3, verse 1, he's going to ask for clarification.
Because he didn't do chapter 3, verse 1. He wrote the whole letter. The chapters and verses help us to point to a certain place, helps us to be able to read together.
[6:27] But chapter 3, verse 1 is absolutely connected to chapter 2, verse 20. Now, that's always true when you read the text. But I want to show you how important it is in this specific letter.

Because the end of verse 20 of chapter 2 is it's all about glory. And it's all about joy. It's about the marks of a faithful shepherd.
So, if you're reading chapter 2, verse 20, then you said, what is it like being a pastor? Chapter 2, verse 20 says it's great joy. Now, chapter 3, verses 1 to 4, talks about affliction.
Chapter 3, no one be moved by these afflictions. I'm sorry, verse 3. Verse 4, telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction.
Chapter 3, verse 1, there's things we can't bear any longer. So, which is it? Is pastoring God's people joy or affliction?
[7:38] Is pastoring God's people wonderful or painful? Now, you understand the answer to that. And I could ask you the same question about being a mom or being a dad or teaching Sunday school.

I could ask you the same question about serving in the church wherever it is you serve. Is it joyful or is it hard? Is serving God's people something that fills you up with delight or is it something that is a burden on your soul?
Well, we understand. The answer, of course, is yes. It's both of those. And that's critically important because what happens so many times in the church is somebody will agree to do a ministry or to lead a certain place of service.
And they do it expecting chapter 2, verse 20. And as long as it's chapter 2, verse 20, they're in. But when it turns to chapter 3, 1 to 4 with affliction, they're gone.
I was just talking to Mark about this right before the service started. The last time I saw statistics, the average length of a pastor's stay was right under two years at any one church.
[9:10] Well, why is that? Well, I'll tell you exactly why that is. Because all things being equal, your first year or two is chapter 2, verse 20.

You're the new guy. We're glad you're here. We've been needing you, waiting for you. You're different. You're interesting. You've got new ideas.
We want to follow you. After about two years, chapter 3 kicks in. Who do you think you are? We ask you to come change things, but change it only the way we ask you to change it.
Whatever that may look like in each individual context. And a lot of times what you see in pastors is when that honeymoon phase is over, and we go from joy to conflict, from joy to affliction, let's pack up and go somewhere else and just do the honeymoon again.
And for people who are called to pastor God's church and lead God's people, they need to understand, and we've got some in this church today that not only already serve as pastors, but others who someday, I believe, will.
[10:32] We need to understand that ministry and the life of serving God's people in the church is absolutely always a mixture of joy and burden all the time.

If a pastor doesn't feel joy, he's taking his eyes off of Jesus. But if he doesn't feel any burdens, he's removed himself from the people.

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You know how many burdens exist in our church on any given week? I mean, today we rejoice. We have so many people who came to church, and we've got people who are baptized, and we've got this amazing group in our new members class, and so many things I'm so thankful for. But tomorrow afternoon, we'll get our reports from our shepherding contacts, and we'll get 45 responses, and I'm going to learn tomorrow, just like all of our ministry staff will, of needs and hurts that we didn't even know about.
Joy and affliction. That's true if you're a parent. It's true if you're a parent in lots of ways, one of which every day has its own joys and afflictions.
[12:01] And if you've got more than one child, it's true because one child is great joy, and one is in great affliction as a parent. You're just constantly torn, excited for what this child's happy about, burdened about what this child's concerned about, and you've got to find a way to exist at the same time with joy and affliction.

And so while this is thinking in the context of the local church, and I want to do justice to it by interpreting it that way, I do think the implications of this are here for all of us to consider that we must be faithful at wherever and whatever we're called to do and called to be.
We must be faithful whether it's days of joy or days of affliction. Affliction. And if you teach a Sunday school class, I hope for you there's lots of joy in it.
But there's going to be affliction because the people you love and the people you teach and the people you serve are going to go through heartache.
And if you don't feel that with them, then you've missed the heart of shepherding. But if you're consumed by that and you no longer have joy in doing God's work, you will not last.
[13:29] I've been privileged to serve here a long time, but we've got several Sunday school teachers. There's several who have been teaching Sunday school here longer than I've been here.

They're really old. How do you do that? I mean, this may be news to you. They don't get a check. They're just voluntarily studying week after week after week. We've got teachers who have been doing that here, not even counting other churches, just in our own church for decades.
And if we could bring them up here and I said to them, would you just talk to us about the joy of doing God's work, work, they could talk forever because they love it.
But when they got done, I could say, could you talk about the pain? Could you talk about the hardship? Could you talk about the disappointment of ministry?
[14:45] And they'd go forever on that too. And you sit back and you say, which is it? Is teaching, is it joyful or is it a burden?

Is it wonderful or is it difficult? And the answer is going to be yes. And if I called moms and dads up here and I said, would you just talk about the joy of being a parent?
Not a one of you would do it without crying. Not a one of you. Because once you start to think about how deeply you feel the joy and the delight of raising children and pouring your life into your children and loving people more than you love yourself, you wouldn't be able to get through it for five minutes without tears.
And if I asked you to talk about the pain of being a parent, we'd hear some stories that would break all of our hearts because there's a lot of affliction involved.
And what I want so desperately for our congregation is to be a church that is faithful no matter what.
[16:02] not just people who are faithful to give and faithful to serve and faithful to be a part of the church when it's chapter 2 verse 20.

I want us to be joyful. I want us to celebrate that. I want us to enjoy the life of that. But if chapter 2 verse 20 is the only lens through which you view your faithfulness, we've missed it.
And what I want is a church that when it's chapter 2 verse 20 we give all the glory to God and when it's chapter 3 verse 3 and verse 4 and there's affliction and there's pain and there's disappointment and there's sorrow and there's burdens, we praise the Lord anyway and we keep serving.
That doesn't mean that if you teach a class you have to teach it forever. That doesn't mean there's something wrong with serving a different way. You're not taking a lifetime appointment if you agree to teach a class, lead a group.
It's certainly perfectly fine to navigate different ways that you serve. But the question can't ever be will I quit just because it's hard?
[17:18] We can't do that. And the pastor's pain that we see here in chapter 3 is not hidden. It's not veiled.

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So let's just look at a few of the details and we'll pick this up in a couple of weeks with more of it. Chapter 3 verse 1 Therefore when we could bear it no longer. So Paul loves these people. Remember he was forced to leave Thessalonica.
He's been hindered from coming back to them. His soul is hurting because he longs to see them and to know how they're doing. You might just make a note Acts 17 helps us to understand some of the background of what he is addressing here.
Paul and Silas and Timothy have to leave Thessalonica. They go to Berea. Soon there's going to be an uproar there. Paul leaves Berea. He goes to Athens. Timothy and Silas stay behind.
Acts 17 Paul goes to Athens by himself. He sees all this horrible idolatry in the land. He sends word. He wants Timothy and Silas to join him in Athens which they do.
[18:25] Acts 17 verse 15 He then decides to send Timothy to Thessalonica. Acts 18 5 So if you read Acts 17 and 18 you can get the behind the scenes story of what we read here in 1 Thessalonians.

Paul eventually goes to Corinth. Timothy and Silas join him in Corinth. And now Paul is going to send his friends away. Timothy and Silas are going to go away.
Timothy goes to Thessalonica. Silas goes to Macedonia. And look at what part of the pain is. Chapter 3 verse 1 Therefore when we could bear it no longer we were willing to be left alone at Athens.
The word here to be left behind to be left behind at Athens alone. The phrasing here to be left behind same word that you would use in their context in their language of someone who had had a death of a loved one and had been left behind.
That's how Paul viewed his brothers in ministry. this is part of the pain that every pastor feels and everyone who does God's work feels that at times you feel like you've been left behind all alone.
[19:49] This is why relationships are so important. Everybody here understands this. You can sit in a large room and feel all alone.

you can sit in a church with hundreds of people and feel all alone. You can sit at your dining room table with your spouse and feel all alone.
Paul says I wanted so much to care for you to check on you I wanted so much to minister to you so he's taking his friends and he's sending them out to other places to do the work of shepherding God's people so much that it's leaving him feeling left behind as if someone in his own life has died.
Verse 2 we sent Timothy our brother and God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ to establish and exhort you in your faith.
Isn't this a great way for someone to think of you? Don't you long for someone to think of you and speak of you the way Paul speaks of Timothy our brother God's co-worker in the gospel.
[21:05] We want to live this way. That people would think of your life and know that you are all in. You're a gospel person.

You're a kingdom minded person. Verse 3 that no one would be moved by these afflictions for you yourselves know that we are destined for this.
Paul cares about the spiritual health of the church he cares about their endurance and he reminds them that affliction is part of following Christ.
This is a part of it. When you're doing gospel work affliction is a part of it. you can have your heart broken but don't let your commitment waver.
You can and should share tears with people as they hurt and grieve but don't let affliction and pain be an excuse to sit on the sidelines.
[22:20] there's pain involved when you serve and you lead God's people but to this we have been called. I think the implications for this in our family are so many.

As you pray for your children when they're sick to be healthy you pray for your teenage children to find a spouse you pray for your college age children to get the scholarship whatever it may be we pray for those things but don't pray only for those things.
Pray for their spiritual life pray for their endurance pray for their ability to endure hardship pray for their willingness to be faithful even in days of affliction this is how God's people pray for each other.
For those of you who are Sunday school teachers that have people you're shepherding let me just encourage you if there is a time when you ask for prayer requests or people email in prayer requests whatever it may be we don't need to pray less for people's needs that they turn in but watch and see how many prayer requests are turned in about someone's spiritual condition what

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the things that we pray about reveal the things that we're concerned about and if somebody's spouse is sick let's pray for them if somebody needs a job let's pray for them and if somebody's child is sick let's pray for them if somebody is lost a loved one and they're sick or they're lonely or they're grieving let's pray for them but watch and see how many prayer requests are turned in that are of eternal matters are we praying for people's spiritual health are we praying for unconverted people to be saved are we praying for boldness to share the gospel are we praying for people to grow as spiritual leaders in their home
I don't want any of our classes or any of our ministry groups to pray less for people's physical needs that's part of what it is to be brothers and sisters in Christ I just want you to be aware if your prayer life or if your class's prayer life is exclusively about earthly things then we need to expand our focus to to endure we want to pray for people's love to endure joy to endure ministries to endure we want to pray for people to glorify Christ in their affliction so one of the things to think about is when you're praying for somebody who is ill let's pray for them let's pray for healing for them let's pray for strength for them but let's also pray this way Lord would you help them to glorify your name while they're sick if somebody's lost their job and they've asked you to pray for them to find a job let's intercede for them let's lift them up before the
[25:58] Lord absolutely but while we're praying for them to find a job let's also pray this way Lord would you use their testimony of faithfulness in their time of need to be an example to people who don't know Christ see if we're not careful what we'll do in life is we'll just fixate on chapter 2 verse 20 I just need joy I just need the pain to go away I just need things to be back the way I want them to be but if we only pray that way we're going to miss what pain is all about it's to drive us to care about eternal matters so parents your children need to hear that from you Sunday school teachers your students need to hear that from you those of you who are leaders of God's people in any way bring that before them pray for the healing pray for the job pray for someone to make a friend pray for someone who's looking to sell their home whatever it may be let's absolutely pray for each other absolutely but the greatest good when someone has a need isn't just for that inconvenience to go away it's for

Christ to be glorified and the way that we pray will reveal a lot of where our heart is for that so we want to pray and it's interesting because in some ways the more you pray faithfully for each other the more pain you feel and yet in the pain you feel the more you pray the more you're fighting for joy this is both of these at the same time you want as parents you don't want your children to always get their way you don't want everything to always be smooth for them you don't build strength and conviction and endurance when everything goes your way you just don't so we've got to pray for our children Lord would you build spiritual resolve in them
Lord would you help them to trust you even in days of hardship so while we're praying for them to get good grades and we're praying for them to be healthy in the football field and we're praying for them to have success from the audition for this solo and when we're doing all these different things that we do as parents you don't need to pray less for their physical needs but I beg you do not overlook!
praying for their spiritual needs Paul is saying part of the pain he feels is that he loves the churches so much he's sending out he's releasing his friends to go minister to the churches even though he knows it's going to make him feel alone verse 4 when we were with you we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction just as it has come to pass and just as you know this is really interesting because he goes to Thessalonica he's originally there just for a few weeks establishes the church he's not there for long but in that brief time he's there he's not only taught them about eschatology that we'll look at when we get into chapter 4 and chapter 5 he didn't save that for later he gave that to them early not just that he's also talking to them from the very beginning of the church that affliction is a part of the
Christian race which is why it's such a horrific disservice when people talk about Christianity as if if you do this that everything is going to go your way if you do this you're going to always be healthy always be strong always get the job it's such a disservice to people not only because it's an outright gospel lie but it creates spiritual quitters because if they thought that following Jesus was some magical exemption card to the afflictions of life when the inevitable pain comes their way they will drop out Paul says the complete opposite verse 4 when we were with you we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction it's an interesting way to build a church isn't it welcome to our church we'd like you to follow

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[31:08] Christ like you be a part of us and by the way there's going to be a lot of pain that's involved come back next week next week welcome back to second week to meet together glad you came back if you missed last week let me give you a summary there's going be a lot of affliction in this journey together bless you come back next week Paul's just there for a few weeks before they get kicked!

out which how providential was it that from the get go Paul taught this new young church that affliction was inevitable because the men the Lord used to start the church would literally be driven out of town and so Paul says from the beginning we told you this is a path of joy but it's joy mingled with affliction so this church that's founded from the beginning with an understanding of the mixture of joy and affliction they may grieve when suffering comes but they endure because they understood from the beginning this is the life so you want to have kids have as many kids the Lord will let you have and you're going to have more joy than you ever thought and you're going to feel pain more deeply than you've ever known you want to get married if it's the right person and they're willing to say yes back it's an important part of getting married someone else that wants to marry you want to get married get married if that's the Lord's will for you you'll experience joy like you've never known before but you're not making it to your first anniversary without some affliction you're probably not making it home from the ceremony without a little affliction you want to share the gospel share the gospel you should and there's great joy when you do but share it long enough you're going to feel the sting of being mocked and being accused and eventually being ostracized this is the life and you can go the route of let's just pretend let's just pretend that if we do everything right things will be easy let's just pretend that if we're just faithful enough we read our bible enough we do enough family devotions everything is going to go our way if we just protect and shelter our kids enough they'll never experience pain and affliction and if we just go to church enough and go to Sunday school enough we'll never have disease in our body and if we just always are honest and work hard Christians will never lose their job for no reason that's not the real world and when people hear that garbage and believe it then the second affliction comes they're gone because it didn't work but what we understand about the Christian life is this isn't about pragmatism this is about conversion and ultimately this isn't about our life on earth it's about eternity and so that's our introduction to chapter three and I hope that you can see how helpful this chapter is and I pray we'll have great ramifications for us and our families and our homes
Lord willing I will be in Los Angeles next Sunday evening when you gather here in the week following we'll pick back up in chapter three with looking at other aspects of the life and ministry of leading God's people Lord we thank you tonight for your word and we do pray that it would take root in our heart and help us and strengthen us we do thank you Lord for the encouragement we gather from being with your people may your word tonight give us hope give us joy and even in the midst of affliction may you grant us endurance in Christ's name amen you're dismissed as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as as

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