Marks of the Shepherd

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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.

Timothy has brought a report back to Paul so he can know what's going on with the church.
He then writes this letter as a follow-up. And so we find ourselves tonight in chapter 2, looking at verses 17 through 20.
One of the things that I enjoy getting to do is I'm a preaching mentor for doctoral students at Master's Seminary.
And so what that means is every semester I get a group of doctoral students that are getting their degree in expositional preaching. And they're assigned to me and so I spend time with them all throughout the semester.
[1:21] They send me self-evaluations, preaching outlines. I meet with them on Zoom and go through while I watch their sermons and try to give them some feedback and some things to think about.

And one of the things that I say for the students the first time they were assigned to me, I always try to help them to think this way. That as pastors, we're not preaching the Bible.
It's not what we do. We preach the Bible to people. And there's a nuance there that I want people to catch.
If you're just preaching the Bible, that's it, then the only concern you have is getting the doctrine right. If you're preaching the Bible to people, your precision on the doctrine is no less.
You still have to get that right. But if you're preaching the Bible to people, now it's not only a question of, did I get the truth right? It's, did I get the truth right?
[2:27] And how do I shepherd and lead these people as they understand it and begin to put it into practice? It's the difference between seeing yourself only as a teacher or as a shepherd.

Shepherding includes teaching. You can't be a faithful shepherd without being a teacher. But it's more than just dispensing the information.
It's caring about the individuals who have received what you've taught. So if somebody is just simply seeing their role as I just preach the Bible, that's it, then the question is, did I get my work done in the study this week and then I'm finished?
But for a biblical pastor, for a shepherd, what you want to do is get the doctrine right and then you go to work during the week striving to say, how do I lead our people, the people I'm serving, whoever it may be, to live out these truths?
So the question is, for you, is not just simply, did I get it right, but am I helping the people live it right? And what churches need are men who not only labor to get it right, but men who love and care about the people to shepherd them, which is why in 1 Peter 5 it says, shepherd the flock of God among you.
[3:59] We talk about this in new members class. We just talked about it last Wednesday, in fact. Shepherd the flock of God among you, that you are to be, as a pastor, among the people.

Leaders are among the people. They're not distant. They're not far away. They're not hard to watch and to talk to and get to know. They shepherd the flock of God among them.
And if you teach Sunday school, you need to have that same idea in your mind. It's not just a question of, did you teach what's true? It's a question of, are you living what you taught?
And are you helping the people you teach live out the truth that you have imparted to them? The faithful shepherd must love theology, yes.
But he must love the people. And when I get to work with doctoral students at the seminary, this is the thing I want them to understand, that faithful pastoring is never less than your time in the study.

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[5:09] It's never less than laboring to understand what the text says. But it is more than that. Never less. But it is more than that. That God has not called us to be lecturers to God's people.

God has not called us to be professors of God's people. He's called us to shepherd the flock of God among us.
So we must love the truth. But faithful shepherds must love people. There is no substitute.
Now, if a pastor loves his people, he will labor to teach them well. But if he's a faithful shepherd, he won't see his work as ending just because the study is finished.
He understands that once he is taught the Word, he goes to work loving and shepherding and leading and helping the people to live the Word. And that should be true for those of you who teach preschool or children or teenagers or college students or adults.
[6:26] That's true for those of you who teach Awana. That's true for those of you who serve in Parents' Day Out. That's true for those of you who lead discipleship groups.

That, yes, you want to get the truth right, but you're not merely teaching the Bible. You're teaching the Bible to people. People who love the truth, but also leaders who love and care about the people.
And I belabor that point because what we're looking at this evening at the end of chapter 2 is about the marks of a faithful shepherd. How does a faithful shepherd of God's people view his life, his ministry, the people that he is serving?
And while I think the first place we want to think about faithful shepherding is in the leaders of the church because you don't want leaders who are being negligent in their role, it's not only those who would be recognizable leaders.
Our church has so many leaders, some of which aren't known by everybody. There may be a few people among our church that most of our congregation would recognize, but on any given Sunday, there are leaders all over our church.
[7:51] All throughout the week, there are leaders who are serving and teaching and discipling. Wednesday evening, before new members class, one of the members on our outreach team came to meet with me briefly to say who is going to be in the new members class because there's people who have been visiting.

He's gone to visit them. He's been praying for them. He's been checking up on them. And he's excited to see if some of them have transitioned from visiting our church to our membership class. Well, that individual doesn't have a recognizable title. And many of you may or may not even know who he was if he was up in front of you tonight. But he's serving and leading in our church every single week. And he does it because he cares about the truth that we teach, but he also cares about the people that we reach.
It's critically important. And so I want you to think tonight as we look at this brief passage about the importance not only of being leaders who teach what's true, but being shepherds who love and serve those that you teach.
You see this for any of you who have a child at home. Of course you want to teach your children right from wrong. Of course you want to teach them and help them to learn. But you're not just teaching them facts.
[9:16] You're pouring into their lives. You're not just merely reading books to your preschooler so they can learn to read. You're investing in their lives so they can learn to read and by doing so are able to come to know the Lord.

You're teaching your children how to grow and live and be responsible, not just because you want them to learn skills, but because you want to impact their life and their heart.
This is one of the things as a church I'm so thankful for because our church has, it's no exaggeration to say hundreds of people who are teachers in our church in one way or another within the ministry of our church.
And these are men and women who care deeply about the precision of doctrine. It can't ever be less than that. But it is more than that because we've got so many of our teachers who faithfully teach and pray and serve and go out of their way to have an impact on the lives of the people they're teaching.
And so whether it is a first-time Sunday school teacher or a doctoral student at Master's Seminary, either way, I want all of us to understand that we're not just teaching the Bible, we're teaching the Bible to people.

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[10:43] Our doctrine matters and the people that we're reaching matter. We care about truth and we care about the truth being lived.

And as we come to the text today, I think we see these marks of a faithful shepherd. And so with that in mind, let's look at the text, verse 17 to 20. But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time in person, not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face because we wanted to come to you, I, Paul, again and again.
But Satan hindered us. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.
This isn't just about getting lesson plans done, getting sermon outlines written, getting Bible study notes finished, getting Sunday school messages composed.
This is about loving people, seeing them as your joy, viewing the people you teach and serve and shepherd and lead as your crown, as an act of worship unto God to love and shepherd his people.
[12:13] So what are the marks of a faithful shepherd? Number one, affection. Affection. We see that in verse 17. But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time in person, not in heart.

Remember, Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica, but though he was forced to leave and driven out, he never stopped loving them, he never stopped thinking about them. He sees the believers in this city as his brothers, as his siblings.
This is his family. This is what happens when you become a believer. It's not only that you have a Savior, though that's primary, but it's also that you're saved into a family.
When somebody joins our church, it's not just that this is the place where they come and attend. This becomes their family, that we are to welcome our new members into our family, brothers and sisters in Christ.
And while there's a responsibility for our new members, for sure, to be active and to get plugged in to meet people, there is a massive responsibility on us to see those God brings to us as additional family members of ours.
[13:27] That there should be an affection that we have as we seek to lead people. Our affection must be real, founded in Christ and lasting.

Now, it's true that sometimes in the church, people squabble. I mean, after all, we are brothers and sisters in Christ.
Anybody here ever have a squabble with your brother or sister? It happens. Sometimes, even in the church, there's issues.
Paul, who writes 1 Thessalonians, doesn't shy away from that when he writes the letter that we know as Philippians. Philippians 4, he very specifically mentions conflict within that church.
A good church, a faithful church, with people who love the Lord and are doing ministry, but even among those who are part of the church and are serving there, he says, help them to be able to get along.
[14:30] Help them to work together with the gospel. He calls them fellow workers whose names are in the book of life. These aren't false pretenders. These are real believers, and sometimes, even in the body of Christ, there's conflict.

We understand that. We don't want to exacerbate that. We don't want to be the source of that. But we don't want to run in fear just because there's conflict in the church.
It happens. It's okay. We want to be gracious. We want to be patient. We want to be forgiving. We want to seek forgiveness. We don't run away from the church just because there is conflict.
It's our family. You don't pack your bags and run away from home just because you had conflict with your sibling at home. You work it out.
And you do it with the understanding that there's affection for the people who are part of your spiritual family. It's one of the fascinating things to me about a church, how people who are so different, so different, come together to dwell in unity, not because we always agree with every single thing, but because even in our differences, there is affection because we love each other.
[16:00] Just today, I met a gentleman who lives in Georgia, and he comes to Oklahoma area in the fall several times a year. He's recently become familiar with our church, and he was telling me this morning that he was grateful to be able to come to our church when he is in Oklahoma from where he normally is in Georgia.

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And as he walked in, I've never met him before until today, but there is just instantly a connection because he's a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. He understands that like me, he's a sinner, say by grace, and together, we have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope, one Savior overall.
And he was an Oklahoma State fan, he told me. So, you know, he's a half-brother. I mean, we're not going to go to a football game together on Saturday, although after last night I may very well become an Oklahoma State fan, but I digress.
But there is a commonality among people who know and love the Lord. This past Wednesday night in our new members class, it was our first group, we've got a big class, a big group of people, then we've got people in our new members class right now asking to raise their hands by decade in their 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s.
That lights me up because I don't want us to be a church for just young people. I love our young people, but if it's a church for young people, they're going to outgrow it. They're going to get too old for it.
[17:35] And I don't want to be a church for just old people like me because if you're a church for just old people, you die off. The church doesn't last. I don't want to be a church that somebody gets to be so old that they're no longer welcome.

I don't want to be a church that somebody's so young that they're not old enough to be a part of it. We're to be a family. And when you go to a family, it's whoever's there is a part of the family and what makes a family great are when you have all the generations together.
I asked them in our class Wednesday if I was hoping somebody was turning 90 in the next three weeks because then we could add 90s to our decade of class, but no one would confess to that. But as you look around that class, that room, even just Wednesday night, it's just a microcosm of what the Lord does as He builds His church. People who are single, people who are married, people who have kids, people who don't have kids, people who are brand new to our church, people who have been around for a while, people who are highly taught and trained in doctrine, others who are just beginning to learn, people of all ages.
It's a family. Affection. And I love the way He phrases. Look back at the text in verse 17. We were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time in person, not in heart.
[19:03] In other words, He says, while they drove me out of the city, they never drove you out of my heart. If you've ever taken a child or a young adult child of yours to college, drop them off in a dorm room, you get in your car and you leave and you come home and they are away from you, but you are, rest assured, they're not away from your heart.

If you've had the privilege of marrying off a son or marrying off a daughter, at the end of that wedding, they drive off. They are physically away from you, but never away from your heart because there's affection.
And that's how the body of Christ should be. And so, whatever your role in the church is, it's not just a question of did you come to church on Sunday.
It's not just a question of if you teach, did you get the doctrine right on Sunday. It's a question of are you growing in affection with God's people that you love, that even if you're away from them physically, that you're never away from them in your heart.
This is the mark of a faithful shepherd. And because in 1 Peter 5, it says that the leaders, it calls them the elders of the church in 1 Peter 5, the elders are to be shepherds and it says that they are to be examples to all the flock.
[20:41] So, if the elders of a church, same word in the New Testament as pastors or leaders, whatever word you want to use in whatever text you read at the time, in 1 Peter 5, to the elders of the church, they are to be shepherds and as shepherds, they are to be examples, which means if the pastors of a church are doing it right, they are serving the people with great affection and as examples of the flock, then all the congregation ought to be growing in affection they have with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Christ. And this is what makes participation in the church so important. Because you can't do what I just described of what verse 17 says, you can't do that from a distance.
I watch a lot of online preaching and I gather information and I gather knowledge and I gather edification, but I can't grow in affection with that church because I don't know them.
This is being a part of the life of the local church. Affection. Secondly, togetherness.
Togetherness. But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time in person, not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face.

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[22:20] Now, a little bit of background of why Paul says this. What likely is happening, remember, Paul has gone there, he started the church, the Lord was blessing it, he was teaching them, he was driven out of the city, and what's happened now is there are some unbelievers, some critics in the city, who are trying to build this case against Paul toward the new believers saying that the reason why Paul isn't there is because he doesn't love them.

That the reason why he left is because he didn't really care for them, and so Paul wants to make sure that this church understands that he was driven out and though he's not with them face to face, he is with them in heart, but his great desire, verse 17, is to see them face to face.
That's his great desire. We've got some people at our church that maybe for a season are homebound, or maybe for a season physically aren't able to come and gather with God's people, and for that group in our church, I'm thrilled that they can watch our services by live stream.
I'm thrilled that people who physically can't participate because of a physical condition or a medical condition, whatever it may be, I'm thankful that they can do that, but if somebody just simply says, I think I'll just stay home and watch church, that's not really even possible because church is the people of God called out gathering together.
It's fellowship. It's connection. It's affection. It's togetherness. And because Paul yet can't be with them, he writes a letter.
[24:10] He has sent Timothy to check on them, but his desire is to be able to be with them face-to-face. Texting is fine.

FaceTime is fine. But face-to-face is where relationships are built. This is why when a wife, hypothetically, is frustrated with her husband and wants to talk about it, she would like him not only to have a conversation, she'd like it to happen with the television off.
Why? Because she understands that it's not just a transfer of information, it's about being together.
This is why when parents are talking to their children, you say things like, look at me.
Well, they can hear you the same if they're not looking at you, but you want to look in their eyes and make sure that they are together with you in what you're saying. Togetherness.
Face-to-face. Affection. Third, persistence. Verse 18, because we wanted to come to you, I, Paul, and again, but Satan hindered us.
[25:45] Paul is persistent. He longs to see them and until he can do so, he has sent Timothy to check on them, but he wants to be with them because ministry is not just about programs or plans or organizational charts or ideas.

Ministry is people. Ministry is people. Ministry can't be ultimately evaluated based on organizational chart.
Not ultimately. Your church can grow by 10% a year. Great. That doesn't mean that the Lord is pleased.
Your church giving can go up and up and up and up. That's fine. That doesn't mean that the Lord is honored. You may add four new classes in a year.
That's great. That doesn't mean that the Lord has been pleased with that. You cannot ultimately evaluate what a church does on a spreadsheet or a chart or a graph because ultimately ministry is about people.
[26:58] Are you growing in your love for Christ in your love for people? Not just is your church organized and the facilities clean and communication done well.

Not only have you covered those bases though all those things are essential and none of those things should be overlooked but that can't be the final verdict on our ministry.
The question is not only have you taught well the question is have you loved your people? Is there a sense of persistence over and over again and again that you long to be with your people?
That you long to care for your people? I think most of you know that throughout the year our staff takes our membership directory we divide that up we contact our church families five families a week you get those calls you get those emails you get those texts where you're being prayed for we don't want to do it one time and throw it away this is something we do persistently because part of shepherding God's people is loving them so tomorrow afternoon I and all of our ministry staff will get a report and it's going to have 45 names none of us doing it five families a week I'm going to get a report with 45 names and it's going to show the prayer requests the needs the responses of our people and the question for me tomorrow is not only did I study to preach this morning not only did I labor to preach tonight but there's a persistence because starting tomorrow

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I get a new group of five families to pray for and it's a reminder that it's not just preaching the Bible it's preaching the Bible to people so my job is not finished tonight until next Sunday morning because all during the week we are supposed to be loving and shepherding God's people to help them with the truths that we teach there's a sense of persistence now an interesting thing he says here in verse 18 I wanted again and again to be there but Satan hindered us and sometimes Paul says the Holy Spirit prevented him Acts 16 verse 6 he says that he wanted to be somewhere having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia Paul discerns somehow in this text the difference between being prevented by the Holy
[29:55] Spirit or being prevented by Satan himself not a lot of details are given to us we want to remind ourselves that we are in spiritual battles we are in spiritual warfare this is real stuff Ephesians 6 10-20 needs to be something you read needs to the armor of God you need to think in terms of what that looks like you need to think in terms of how you can pray and have the helmet of salvation the sword of the spirit the belt of truth the shoes of peace all the things Ephesians 6 talks about remind yourself that spiritual warfare is a real thing yet as Paul would most assuredly affirm the Lord is still sovereign even over that there's a persistence faithful shepherds love their people over and over and over again fourth verses 19 and 20 there's a sense of joy verse 19 for what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our

Lord Jesus that is coming is it not you he loves this church so much that he says it brings me joy and I can't wait to celebrate even before the Lord with all that you are doing Philippians 4 1 therefore my brothers whom I love and long for my joy and my crown this is how God's leaders are to see the people they serve and the people they lead that you are our joy that doing the work of ministry is not something you do because you have to it's something you do because you have to you have to I can't do anything else I mean I'm grateful that the Lord's given people a lot of different gifts and skills he didn't give me a lot like I can't do anything else somebody asked me the day they said you mentioned on the podcast you wanted to preach for 25 more years kind of shock and my answer was what else am
I going to do I'm not going back to Brahms like I did at 15 I can't do anything else I don't do this because I have to in the sense of it's frustrating I do it because if I don't do this I'm going to explode I'm going to die this is a joy this is a delight the church is not something that we just have to joy and our crown you as the body of Christ you are God's sweet gifts to me in my life this church is God's sweet gift as a part of my life this church isn't my church this church doesn't exist for me if I die tomorrow the church is just fine no problem whatsoever nothing will miss a beat because I'm not the head of the church Christ is but as a is that the church is a gift to
God's people and there is a joy that we have with each other and for each other that's going to take more than a lifetime on this earth to enjoy in full and so praise the Lord we get all eternity to enjoy being together Paul says you're my joy and my crown you are the highlight of my life verse 20 you are our glory and our joy we understand all of that's possible only because of what we have in Christ so as we say that each other we are our joy and crown we understand that is still a cross centered thankfulness because the only thing that makes us brothers and sisters in
Christ is the work of the cross so Galatians 6 God forbid I should boast except in the cross of Jesus Christ our Lord which means when you see the church the brothers and sisters as your joy and your crown it's the recognition that what's brought us together is the work of Christ on the cross that's why our differences are irrelevant because what has brought us together is primary I know that for some of you your background may include going to other churches that were filled with friction and strife and disunity and if that's true I hope that our church has been a place of healing and a place of seeing while we are far from perfect that this is a place of great unity but it's a place of great unity not because everybody here has the same opinion but because we have the same affection big difference our affection is for
[35:19] Christ and because of that an affection for each other how are God's shepherds to love and to lead with affection with togetherness with persistence grace and with joy we all understand there are times where ministry is hard we know that there are times where it's hard to teach your class there are times where it's hard for you to serve the ways that you serve there are times where it's hard to minister there are times where you feel overwhelmed there are times where you maybe feel overlooked pozw times pozw pozw pozw pozw there's times where life is so hard that it just feels like you're fighting for joy that's true but one of the ways you know that you belong to

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Christ is through it all you look at the people in the church and say this isn't some divine obligation this is my joy the people you serve aren't pawns for you to move around on some organizational chart the people you serve are your crown and so for pastors in a church for deacons in a church for Sunday school teachers in a church for parents in a church for leaders of any kind in a church church let us never forget we're not merely teaching the Bible we're teaching the Bible to people never less than doctrinal precision that must always be a part of our life but it is more than that it's loving the people you serve it's connecting with the people you serve it's praying for them it's through your
Sunday school classes where you take meals to somebody it's where you visit them in the hospital it's where you write them a note of encouragement this is what true ministry is not because you have to like someone is going to get you in trouble if you don't but you just have to because you love them so much can you imagine for those of you who are grandparents if somebody said here's your grandbaby you have to hold her you have to hold him you don't have to you just have to it's not obligation it's that you have to because that grandbaby is your joy and crown those who teach Sunday school I hope that you see it that way you're not teaching that Sunday school class because you have to you're teaching it because all throughout the week you think about them you pray for them you're writing a note to them you're encouraging them you want to help them through the seasons of life you're not serving because you have to you're serving because you have to you've got to do this and joy makes all the difference and that's why within the church the people who understand that don't go through life looking at spiritual gifts and spiritual service as some earthly punishment you have to endure until you get to be in heaven instead you see it as
God's grace that would allow you to be a part of the body of Christ and the people you serve they themselves are your joy and they are your crown and I pray that the pastors of our church would lead faithfully in this I pray that the recognizable leaders in our church would be exemplary in this and if we do this how the Bible tells us if 1 Peter 5 is lived out if your elders your pastors your shepherds your teachers if they are examples to the flock then that means our congregation as a whole should be growing in this which means that together our affection for Christ and for each other is growing our togetherness as a family is growing our persistence in being faithful over and over again is growing and our joy in the Lord and with each other continues to grow that is what the church is supposed to be
Lord your word is so helpful it is so instructive to us and I pray that it would be truths even this evening that would help us guide us refine us we do thank you for this congregation and pray your hand of blessing as we continue to serve you in Christ's name amen was that Miss Rosie May that's my granddaughter mother She She ago she said she said she said she said she said she said she said she said she said she

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