Attributes of an Effective Shepherd

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[0:00] Go ahead and open your Bibles with me to 1 Thessalonians chapter 3.

! In my time in ministry, and really growing up in general, who have had the greatest impact on me, were the ones that didn't just see their churches as a career path, as a way to make a living. They saw their churches as a flock that God had entrusted to them to love and to provide for. You know, in ministry, the most powerful and memorable moments that I have with Nicole are not from behind the pulpit, but in the lives of those who are part of our churches that we've served in, here and elsewhere, from funerals to hospital rooms to hospice beds, conversations in living rooms, times of grief and in times of joy, and celebration.
As a shepherd of a church, you're expected to be there for all of it and share those experiences with them. And I love getting to preach.
I love getting to lead in music. I love music, but everything that I do up here, for me, it would just seem so empty if I didn't get to see it lived out and how it affects you all in your everyday lives.
[1:50] So getting to be involved with your lives is just a, it's a privilege. It's a blessing. It's where the real ministry takes place.

In our text today, it's really a continuation of what we were reading last week when Paul was talking about just this angst, this grieving that he was going through because he was separated from his congregation and he wasn't getting to see these things take place in their everyday lives.
And the more that I read about Paul, the more I'm beginning to love this guy. Just seeing the affection that he has, the care that he has for his flock, for his churches, it just gives us a great example of what a pastor should be.
And in our text that we're going to look at today, Paul has sent Timothy to the church at Thessalonica and we're going to see Paul's response to Timothy's report that he brings back.
So if you would, let's stand together and read 1 Thessalonians chapter three. Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone.
[3:06] And we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ to establish and exhort you in your faith that no one be moved by these afflictions.

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, for this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.
But now that Timothy has come to us from you and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us as we long to see you.
For this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction, we have been comforted about you through your faith. For now we live if you are standing fast in the Lord.
[4:09] For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God? As we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.
This is the word of the Lord, church. You may have a seat. So we started off our text today in verse one with the word therefore.
Just a good hermeneutical principle. I want to throw this in here. Whenever you see the word therefore, you generally need to look back and see this is what Paul is continuing. This is the train

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of thought that he is bouncing off of as he continues his discourse.
And when you see therefore in our particular text, that's going off of the text that we preached last week, which was verses 17 through 20 in chapter two. So if you want to gain a little bit more context, you can go back and read that on your own.
[5:28] But as we study the text today, we are going to see what it reveals to us about being an effective shepherd. And that's really the main idea of our sermon today and of this text.

The main idea is revealing the attributes of an effective shepherd. Paul gives us an amazing example of what an effective shepherd looks like.
But like Paul, everyone who aspires to the role of shepherd or pastor or leader or teacher, they are also still part of a flock themselves.
They are part of the flock of the good shepherd. Any attribute that we might seek to exhibit in our leadership, it really what it is, it's an imperfect representation of the good shepherd that we are trying to emulate in our leadership and in our lifestyle.
So the good shepherd, I just want to read this text from John chapter 10, verses 11 through 18. It's not going to be on the screen. So if you have your Bibles, you're welcome to go there. But John chapter 10, verses 11 through 18 says, I am the good shepherd.
[6:33] This is Jesus talking to his disciples. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away.

When the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it, the man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. Then Jesus goes on to say, I am the good shepherd.
I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Just as the father knows me and I know the father and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen.
I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my father loves me is that I lay down my life only to take it up again.
No one takes it from me, but I lay it down in my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my father.
[7:38] Now if we look at this description of the good shepherd, Jesus willingly laying down his life, fighting off the wolves.

There's an intimate bond that we see here between the sheep and their shepherd. And all this is because of the shepherd or Jesus' obedience to his father. We also see throughout Jesus' ministry that he equips the disciples for the work and the trials that lay ahead of them.
Now as we look at these attributes that we'll be studying today, I want us to have in mind the picture of the good shepherd whom Paul is seeking to imitate in his own ministry. Paul willingly has been in situations where his life has been on the line.
We see that Paul was not scared to lay down his life for his sheep. Paul has stood his ground and fought back against the wolves that would bring false believing and false doctrine into their midst. These false wolves would have scattered the church and led them astray. So keep in mind how Paul is imitating the good shepherd in his own life and ministry. Also, keep these qualities in mind as you think about your own local pastors here at this church, your lay elders.
[8:57] And on a more personal note, I also want you to think about how these attributes can affect your personal life in your personal pursuit to make disciples.

If there are people that you have influence over, then there's an opportunity for you to be a shepherd. If you were the father and the man of your household, you were the shepherd of your house.
So these attributes, they can apply to you as well. You know, even in your personal life, outside of your family, maybe just in your friend group, if you are running with some lost people in your life, then I gotta tell you, I've seen it time and time again where believers who are otherwise excluded from kind of the inner circle of their friends, when disaster strikes, when times of hardship and trial come that their worldview can't answer for, they look to something that transcends themselves. And they tend to turn to a person of faith. And that will be an opportunity for you to be the shepherd that can lead them to the good shepherd. So the list that we're going through today, it's not gonna be an exhaustive list.
This is not gonna cover every single attribute of a good shepherd, but these are just the four that have been highlighted for me from our text today. And the first attribute of an effective shepherd is

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this.
[10:23] An effective shepherd equips others for ministry in the flock. He equips others for ministry in the flock. One character that is seen all throughout Paul's ministry in his letters in the book of Acts is Timothy.

Timothy. Timothy as a close companion, as a disciple, as a friend, a trusted co-worker. In this letter, we see that Timothy is also a co-sender of this letter.
Paul mentions him in the greeting as being one of them that is sending this letter. And he's also a trusted messenger and minister alongside Paul. And Paul says when he could bear it no longer, in other words, it's that angst, that separation that he was experiencing that we talked about last week. When he could bear it no longer, he sent Timothy to the church at Thessalonica to find out how they were doing. Now, I want us to look at verse 2 again just to see how Paul describes Timothy.
He didn't say, yeah, we've got this young whippersnapper that needs some ministry experience, so we're going to send him to you to work him in. No, Paul doesn't say that. He says that he is our brother and he's not just our co-worker, he is God's co-worker in the gospel of Christ to establish and exhort you in your faith.
[11:47] Paul is letting these people know that they are so important to him that he has sent someone of great importance to him to comfort them and to establish them in their faith.

And as we look at Timothy, you know, what I see is a man that Paul is invested in, a man that Paul has trained to do the work, so much so that Paul was willing to send him.
Obviously, with objectives in mind, Paul had a job description in mind for what he wanted Timothy to do, but Paul sent him alone without his supervision and we know how much Paul loves his churches.
We know how much Paul loves those that have been entrusted to him by God, so for Paul to send somebody without his supervision alone to care for this flock, it showed a great deal of trust on his part in Timothy.
Now, this begs the question, why didn't Paul go himself? Well, there's a couple of reasons that I can think of as to why Paul wouldn't just go back to Thessalonica on his own.
[12:53] The first being is that Paul was probably not welcomed back in that city. There were a lot of people that knew who Paul was, especially the city officials. Maybe some of the radicals that were there that caused this riot were still there looking out for Paul, so Paul can just very well retrace his steps and just waltz back into the city.

Another reason is that Paul was in Athens at this time. When Paul was writing this letter, he was in Athens starting a new ministry, starting a new flock. You can read about it in Acts chapter 17, but just to kind of give you some reminders here, in Acts 17, this is where Paul was going through the streets and he saw the altar to the unknown God, or whenever he preached about the resurrection in the Areopagus.
So like many of Paul's evangelical encounters that he had in these cities, this led to new converts, this led to new believers that had no doubt become very dear to Paul's heart.
Now when a leader's influence grows, what he needs to do is he needs to equip other leaders to continue that work, just like he did with Timothy.
Not only was Timothy's name attached to this letter, but we see his name attached in a lot of letters, in the greeting, saying that this guy is also sending this to you as well, like in Philippians, Philemon, Colossians, 2 Corinthians, 2 Thessalonians.
[14:20] And not only was Timothy a co-sender, but he was also entrusted with the ministry of sending these letters and continuing the ministry on his own, just like we see in Thessalonica, just like we see in Ephesus, which we're studying about in 1 Timothy on Sunday mornings in Pastor Mike's sermon series.

But probably one of the most notable jobs that Paul had assigned Timothy, where my heart just kind of hurts for Timothy, is Paul sent him to the church at Corinth.
In 1 Corinthians 4.17 says, this is why I've sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of the ways in Christ as I teach them everywhere in every church.
All right, to know why this was such a difficult assignment, let's look at the church at Corinth for just a second. If I was Timothy, I would probably be thinking, Paul, you want me to go to Corinth? The church that has turned the Lord's Supper into an occasion for excessive drinking and death by the Lord's judgment, that church? Or do you mean the church that was also celebrating the

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son-in-law living with his mother-in-law and having relations, that church that was celebrating that kind of depravity?
[15:38] Or maybe the church that turned the spiritual gifts of tongues into a sideshow? This church had a number of problems. The men were also still going to visit the temple prostitutes in that area.

So in my mind, if Paul had said, you're going to go to this church, I would say, you know, I'm not doubting your sincerity, Paul, but I'm probably going to wait for a giant fish to make sure that God is actually calling me to this place.
So with all these problems, this is a big task. Paul trusts Timothy. Paul invested in other leaders. He equipped them to do the work just as Jesus did with his followers. You know, the followers of Christ, his disciples, I told you we're going to be kind of looking back and forth between Paul's ministry and Jesus' ministry.
Jesus also equipped his disciples to do the work. They weren't just bystanders. They weren't just people that were watching and taking notes. No, they took part in the ministry.
[16:41] In Mark 6, 7 through 13, it says, and he called the 12 and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff, no bread, no bag, no money in their belts, but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics.

And he said to them, whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.
So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent and they cast out demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.
So Jesus was equipping his disciples to do the work and then he was deputizing them to do the work. He was sending them out to do these things. And in our own life, I think the most notable sending out of Jesus' followers is the Great Commission.
So an effective shepherd that is going to seek to minister like Jesus did is going to equip others to do the work of ministry. This is something that any vocational pastor or lay pastor should aspire to.
[17:57] But honestly, every Christian has the responsibility or the call to multiply. We are called to train others in godliness.

All of us are. To see others live for and love Christ should be our greatest passion in life. First in our homes and then in our wider circles of influence.
So invest in others. A leader passes on his passions and the tools to live out those passions. Fortunately, as Christians, when somebody comes to Christ, they receive something better than we can ever give them, which is the Holy Spirit.
So honestly, Jesus does all the hard work for us in equipping these people to live for him. But as those that are equipping, as those that are bringing others up, we have the responsibility to help them live in the Spirit.
To teach them to follow all the commands that Jesus had given them, just like it said in the Great Commission, and to watch them grow up in their relationship. It's a blessed process that we're going to talk a little bit more about here in a minute.
[19:09] But the next attribute of an effective shepherd is this. An effective shepherd will comfort his flock. An effective shepherd will comfort his flock.

When the sheep are hurting, that should be a shepherd's call to action. Nothing aggravates me quite as much as seeing a pastor that just doesn't really care when his church is hurting, when there's a member that is going through a difficult time and they just don't even care to reach out, make a phone call, write a letter, anything.
It's like, my job is at the pulpit and that's it. This is why it's an important part of a pastor's job. It's in trials that our faith is going to be tested.
And perseverance through those trials will grow our faith. They will sanctify us. There is a war that is being waged for the souls of the flock and Satan is either going to corrupt the hearts through his lies in the midst of these trials or Jesus can sanctify their hearts through the truth of his word.
And as pastors, as leaders, as people that are equipping, you are agents of that truth in the lives of those that are hurting and suffering. Now, different situations call for different types of pastoring, whether you are there as a voice of truth to correct poor believing or you're just there as a presence

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to grieve with those companions.
[20:40] In our text today, we see that Paul has this deep desire to be with his flock, but he can't. And remember that Paul did not leave his church in a peaceful state.

Paul was forced to flee. And all this time has passed and they've been without their shepherd. They've been going through all these different trials and they have not had their pastor there.
So all of these possibilities are going through Paul's head. The worst being that the tempter has tempted them and led them astray. That's possibly the greatest fear that I have whenever I see a church member going through just an extremely difficult time is what lies is Satan trying to insert in their heart?
How is Satan trying to lead these people astray through those difficult times? That's why as mature believers, as Sunday school teachers, as pastors, as deacons, as elders, when we see a church member that's hurting, that's our call to step in, to intercede, to exhort, to equip, to love them through these difficult times.
Satan is going to use outward circumstances to try to pollute our inward faith. And relatively speaking, these believers that Paul was concerned about, they were new believers.
[21:59] These were not seasoned Christians. And one thing that we see that Paul did is that he did everything he could to equip the believers and to prepare them for these trials, for these persecutions that were going to come their way.

If you look again in verse four, it says, 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.
This is how God can use trials as a sanctifying experience. It's a sanctifying experience because we know that our good shepherd has already prophesied about it beforehand.
We were to expect these things and we see God's faithfulness whenever these trials come about because he warned us about them in advance, just like Paul did with his sheep.
In John 16, 33, again, when Jesus was about to be crucified, he warned his disciples of this. He said, I've said these things to you, that in me you may have peace.
[23:00] In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart. I have overcome the world. So despite the tribulations that Jesus has prophesied about, he's saying in me you can still have peace.

Paul did not see these trials as a conflict of his faith, but as a fulfillment of his faith because his Savior, who he loved so much, had prophesied that it would be so.
So what do we do with this? We lean on the one who knew it was coming all along. We lean on the one who has overcome the world.
That's how we have peace in our good shepherd in those trials. Jesus was preparing the disciples in his final hour for the trials ahead, and Paul prepared his disciples for the trials that were ahead, and because of this, because of these spiritual truths that Paul passed on to these new believers, we now have this great letter of encouragement and triumphant faith that we see in these believers. believers. As a loving shepherd, Paul sent Timothy in his absence to comfort these new believers. He sent them there for three reasons.
[24:18] To establish, to exhort, and also just to bring back a report of how the church was doing to him. Now, the first thing that Paul said was to establish their faith.

Now, establishing and exhorting, we're going to go through both of these words briefly here, but to establish, that is building a foundation of good believing. Establishing is building a foundation of good believing.
Correcting false believing that can creep in as a result of pain and suffering. I'm a firm believer that the ministry of presence in times of hardship is one of the most important ministries in times of grief. As a pastor and as other pastors I have known, I can say that probably one of the hardest things for us to learn how to do is just to learn to be silent and to suffer with our congregation at times. Because sometimes there's no words. Sometimes there's nothing you can say or do. There's no scripture that you can quote that's going to just make the pain go away. Sometimes they just need a loving presence there to share their pain.
[25:28] But if the tempter, if Satan, that's who Paul is talking about when he says the tempter, if he is also making himself present as he will, then the truth needs to be proclaimed so that Satan cannot win the day in those times of testing.

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Remember, we don't fight against flesh and blood. The war that Satan is waging for us is for your soul. And that's why it's so important for us to be equipped with the knowledge and truth of God's word so that when trials do come, we have something to lean on.
We have a firm foundation that we can fall back on. The truth is this. You cannot lean on a God in the hard times that you have ignored in the good times. If you want to be prepared for the hard times, then lean on God now.
Invest in his word now. That's why Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7, 24 through 25, everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock and the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on the house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock.
Your faith is only going to be as strong as a foundation that you build it on. So build it on the rock of God's word. That is what it means to establish good believing in your life, to establish your faith.
[26:55] Now, the next thing that Paul said was exhortation, to exhort. If establishing is the act of building a foundation of good believing, exhorting is this, encouraging good living based on good believing.

Where establishment is more centered around a foundation of truth, exhortation is going to be the encouragement of correct living centered around that truth that has been established.
You can't have one without the other. They go hand in hand with each other. Now, one of the benefits of being part of a local body of believers is having other brothers and sisters to encourage you, to exhort you in that truth.
Hebrews 10, 24 says, and let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good works. establishing and exhorting faith. These are both part of being an effective pastor and an effective disciple maker.
Reminding those hurting of correct believing and encouraging them to cling to it when the tough times do come and they will come. And when we see these things take root in the lives of those we are investing in, there is a proper response for the disciple maker and for the pastor.
[28:14] And that's our third attribute is that an effective pastor or an effective shepherd rejoices in the growth of his flock. They rejoice in the progress that they're seeing.

When my wife and I used to teach Taekwondo, I loved watching new students. Like these were people that were just fresh that had never done anything athletic in their lives.
And I know that from the look of me right now, you're probably thinking, well, you've never done anything athletic either. Well, that promise that was 40 pounds ago. But watching these people come out to the mat for their first time, the lack of coordination was quite the spectacle to observe. But all the same, as their instructor and as the other students that were kind of gathering around them that were more experienced, they would just applaud their efforts.
Because at that stage, anything was progress. And progress was always celebrated in our school. But at some point, and it was really neat to watch this process happen.
[29:18] I'm sure that some of you that are coaches, you probably understand this too, that there's some point when something just clicks. It's where it finally starts to take root and you can see things just building on each other.

You see this momentum take place in their lives. We would see it in their demeanor. Their demeanor would change. The way that they carried themselves would change.
The way that they responded to physical demands, that would even change from dread to almost anticipation. Like, bring it on. I'm ready. They could visibly see their own progress and it would embolden them to try all the harder.
And as their instructors, we would just applaud them and cheer them on. And it was just an amazing process to watch. As a pastor, there is nothing that brings more joy than watching believers mature in their faith.
To go through that sanctification process of becoming more like Christ. to see God's word take root in their lives. You get to celebrate with them whenever they discover new things about their faith or about God and their word.
[30:25] And yes, at times you also have to correct them. There is still false believing that can creep in even after they've become a new Christian. So you've got to be there to correct them and to point them back in the right direction.

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If we just look at the way that Paul expresses his joy in verses six through nine says, but now that Timothy has come to us from you and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us as we long to see you for this reason, brothers in all our distress and affliction, we have been comforted about you through your faith.
For now we live. If you are standing fast in the Lord, for what thanksgiving can we return to God for you for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God.
Paul's joy was evident in his letter that he was writing to this church. To see God's word take root in their life, to see his fears assuaged that, you know, the tempter had come and had led them astray. That was his first fear. And also as you go on, I think one of the things that Paul feared was how the church viewed him. Had they lost faith in him as their pastor?
[31:48] Had he lost that standing as their shepherd in their lives? Because remember, Paul was driven from this city. This was not a good situation that Paul would leave a church in and it wasn't his fault.

But he had just done proclaiming all this truth. There were new believers. There were great things happening in the city. And all of a sudden things just went in an uproar and he had to flee the city. So Paul's wondering, what does this church think of me since I have left them in this state? Because the persecution continued. This was not something that ended when Paul left.
Well, Paul brings back news to the contrary that absolutely lifts Paul's spirit. It says there's a report of love, a report of kind remembrance of Paul.
And even more than that, there's a longing to see him again. So he's comforted that he has not been rejected by this church, but he is also rejoicing that their faith has withstood the test.
[32:49] This apostle had a lot of joy in this church. Their faith has endured. Now this celebration and exhortation, it takes place in our church as well.

One of the most visible ways that I think we see that in our churches with baptism, when somebody makes that next step of faith and obedience. My favorite part of baptism is, first of all, when the new believer, whenever he confesses his faith in Jesus Christ, but I also love to hear the applause, the hoops and the hollers of the congregation that's rejoicing in their brother or sister's step of obedience.
I love seeing the members come up and hug and encourage these new believers in their faith. It's a beautiful picture of what the church should be for each other and encouraging each other to the good works.
Now the big question is, why do we celebrate spiritual progress? Why do we celebrate these things? It's because with every new believer, we see God's kingdom grow.
With every step of sanctification, we see the image of Christ come through even more vividly in a new believer's life. And we see Satan losing more ground every day.
[34:11] And as Paul mentioned, he said, we also know that our efforts are not in vain. I mean, who doesn't like to receive results from their efforts?

Any former teachers or educators in here? Have you ever just poured yourself into a student time and time again, wondering if something was ever going to stick, if something was, if there was ever going to be a ray of hope and finally you see it?
That's got to bring you a lot of joy. My middle school math teacher is still waiting for that ray of hope. But we rejoice when we see that our work is not in vain.
But if we look in scripture, obedience is never in vain. Isaiah 55, 11 says, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.
It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. Yes, we rejoice when we see visible fruit from our labor.
[35:18] Who wouldn't? But you can also rejoice in the obedience of sharing God's truth to someone that is lost or to some believer that is hurting. So believer, when you feel like your efforts might be in vain, remember that anything done in loving obedience to our Savior, it's never going to be in vain.

God will use it how he wants because our God, who is in need of nothing, chooses to work through the obedience of his saints.
Now the fourth attribute of an effective shepherd, and this is probably one of the more important ones that we're going to look at today. An effective shepherd intercedes in prayer for his flock.

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He intercedes in prayer for his flock. Along with the ministry of the word, the most important job of a pastor or a shepherd, which unfortunately is often one of the most overlooked, is to pray, to intercede for his flock.
Unfortunately, a lot of times we see it as a plan B when there's nothing else that we can actually do for the person. That's how I hear prayer talked about sometimes. And I will be honest with you, it's tough to not slip into that mindset because we're doers.
[36:39] We want to do things. We want to make things physically better for someone. We want to see the fruit from our labor, just like we were talking about. And it's hard not to slip into that mindset, but interceding to someone higher than ourselves, I mean, that's really part of our everyday lives.

My kids, if they need something that is beyond their ability to obtain, what do they do? They intercede to their parents. They go to someone that can give it to them.
And if their parents aren't going to give it to them, Nana sure will. So they go to Nana. Employees, when you have an issue at work, you go higher up to your manager.
And if that doesn't work, you go to the CEO or the main boss. You go to human resources. For every issue in our daily lives, we have the police that we can intercede to. So beseeching a higher power, that's just something that we're prone to do.
But unfortunately, when it comes to beseeching the higher power of God, sometimes we see it as plan B, when nothing else is going to work. And that's sad, especially when from Scripture, we see that God works through the prayers of his people.
[37:48] Probably the most notable in Scripture was the person of Moses. There is nothing more important that Moses did for the children of Israel than interceding between them and God.

Probably the most notable was in Exodus 32. Israel had just made their golden calf, and God had said, I'm going to wipe them off the map. I'm done. I'm going to make you into a great nation.
So what does Moses do? He steps in. He intercedes. He pleads for mercy. And the result being God relenting from his righteous wrath. And we see Moses doing this constantly throughout his ministry.
The time that he spent in the tent of meeting, the time that he spent on the mountain. There's no more important job that I can point to that Moses did than interceding for his people.
And what an image of Christ that we have, who is now before the throne of God interceding for us.
Now, Paul, this was also a ministry that he took very seriously.
[38:53] And in a lot of his letters, we have these beautiful prayers and intercessions that he writes down. And so I want to read and go through this prayer that he makes for his church, for his people.

Starting in verse 11, So what is the first thing that Paul prays for?
Reunification. Reunification. Paul has a desire that he is laying at God's feet. He wants to be reunited with his church. And he is casting all of those hopes and desires before a sovereign God.
Because the earthly odds of him getting back to Thessalonica, they don't look good. There have been too many enemies that have been made. There have been too many barriers that have been put up for Paul just to turn around and retrace his footsteps.
So when all earthly hope seems to have faded, Paul is turning to his heavenly hope. The next point that Paul prays for is growth in love.
[40:13] God has intended for Christians to function together, to endure trials together, and to serve and fulfill the Great Commission together.

And love is going to be the defining trait that their success or failure is going to hinge on. In Colossians 3.14, Paul wrote this to another church, And above all, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.
The foundation for Christian fellowship and effectiveness is love. First, the love that Jesus has shown us before we loved him, then our love for Christ, and then our love for one another.
There's nothing that's going to fracture the unity of the church faster than refusing to love one another. And there's also nothing that's going to handicap a church worse than this refusal to show Christ-like love to one another.
Because when that love is removed, it's going to be very easy for Satan to insert conflict. I've seen churches where there was so much conflict, where there was no love for one another.
[41:30] They couldn't seem to get things together inside their own walls, that the people on the outside of their walls would just walk by the church and shake their heads. They don't have anything that we need.

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That's why Jesus said that we are going to be known by our love. That's what we need to be known by. Because if that is true, then Satan is going to try to make the opposite true, that we will be known by our conflict, by our strife, and our discontent with one another.
So for this church to continue its effectiveness, which Paul has already boasted about earlier in this letter, he is saying that he is praying for love and unity to continue to flourish in their midst.
And the third point that Paul prays for is blamelessness at Christ's return. As we continue through this epistle, and really in a lot of Paul's letters, there's always this anticipation of Christ's return that is the backdrop for everything that he is saying.
He is looking forward to that day when Jesus is going to come back. Another apostle that wrote something similar, 1 Peter 3, 14, Peter said this to a suffering church, therefore, beloved, as you anticipate these things, make every effort to be found at peace, spotless and blameless in his sight.
[42:49] So we've got two apostles telling two different types of suffering believers that their hope of Christ's return hinges on them being found blameless, being found spotless in his sight.

So the important question to ask here is, how are we going to be made blameless? How are we going to be found spotless in his sight at his return? Paul answers this question for us in Colossians 1, 22.
It says, He is now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.
So what is our hope? How will we be presented blameless? Jesus, his suffering, his death, his perfection in the midst of suffering on your behalf. Where our sin has made us stained, Jesus' death and resurrection will make us clean.
Clean. Where our obedience might bring us suffering in this life temporarily, Jesus' obedience offers us hope for eternal life.
[43:56] And we have this hope because our Savior has promised us that he is coming back. And we can look forward to that day. We talked a lot about the attributes and roles of an effective shepherd.

The labor of intercession. The rejoicing of spiritual growth. Ministry of comfort for those that are hurting. And the ministry of equipping.
And I want to leave you with this main application today to reflect on. And it's this, to hold your shepherds to a high standard. And also, seek to replicate that standard in your own disciple making. In your own life. It is true biblically that those who desire to teach, those who are elders and pastors, yes, they are going to be held to a higher standard.
And I have no issue with being called out should I ever fall short of that standard. In disciple making, it's a very heavy burden and load. But it's a blessed process to go through.
[45:11] In whatever context you find yourself as a disciple maker, seek to emulate these attributes. As a pastor, my primary role is to prepare you all to do the work.

So don't just read these attributes and think they only apply to me or Pastor Mike or the elders. Fathers, your family needs to see these attributes in you.
Teachers, while I know that you're limited in what you can say from a legal standpoint, your lifestyle is going to reflect these truths and open the door for effective ministry. Are you a boss or a manager?
You have many people that are under your influence that are going to see these things shine through in your life and they are going to weigh everything you say and do against the testimony that you bring forth in Christ.
So whatever your sphere of influence is, desire and strive to be an effective shepherd in your own lives. Let's pray. Father, we thank you, Lord, that you have given us the best example of a good shepherd in Jesus Christ.
[46:20] Lord, we thank you that also in your power, you have given us your Holy Spirit to strive to be like Christ, to emulate these things in our own lives.

So Lord, I pray for every believer that is here. Lord, I pray that they would seek to be like the good shepherd in their lives. Lord, as they are ministering to those that are around them, as they are sharing your truth, Lord, I pray that they would, that they would be the shepherds in their own lives, that they would be the disciple maker.
Lord, I pray for the elders and the pastors that are here, Lord, that they would also seek to pursue the likeness of Christ, our good and perfect shepherd. Lord, I pray for those that are here that don't

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know the good shepherd, that don't know Christ, as their good and perfect shepherd.
Lord, I pray that today would be their day of salvation. Lord, that you would lead them to a recognition of their sin, their need for atonement, their need for reconciliation, that only Jesus Christ, the shepherd that laid down his life for them, can bring.
Lord, I pray that you'd be glorified in everything that is said and done today. I pray for all these things in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.
[47:38] you

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