

The Pastors Flock

Sovereign Grace Churches Pastors Conference 2022

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Well, this is the transition message to the JV preachers.

[laughter]

Thanks for putting us in, coach. We appreciate it.

[laughter]

It is a privilege to be here with you. It is just the next closest thing after our local church to heaven, isn't it? If you would open your Bible to the Book of Acts chapter 20:28-32. We're going to be walking through this evening. It is always a privilege to preach to who I agree with Mark those that are the best pastors in the world, in my opinion, to my pastoral heroes and pastors and their wives of sovereign grace. Tonight, I have the added privilege and challenge of preaching to pastors and their wives about pastoral ministry. Jared was kindly asking me how my message was going and I just said, how does one inspire the choir?

How do you talk to the men that I look up to as pastors in such a way that they're encouraged in their pastoring, but every pastor needs fresh inspiration because of the value and preciousness of our calling? I think we find that in this passage, in Acts, like few other places in scripture, perhaps no other place, more so than here. Let's read together. Remembering this is God's word. It comes even to pastors with power to inspire, to change, to sustain, to comfort, to transform. Let's read it with that expectation, [Acts 20:28](#).

***28** Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God,[e] which he obtained with his own blood. **29** I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; **30** and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. **31** Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. **32** And now I commend you to*

God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Lord bless the preaching and the believing of your word.

I have a distinct memory of the day that my wife and I drove our brand-new baby girl home from the hospital.

We had spent the last two days under the watchful days of excellent nurses and medical staff receiving their confident care but as we walked out in the sliding doors, close shut behind us, and we were standing there alone, a new thought came into our mind suddenly.

Someone has made a mistake.

It can't possibly be the case that we are allowed to leave with her. This can't be legal. They must not know we have no idea what we're doing, and yet we are entrusted with this precious life. I remember the drive home. There has never been a more cautious drive home. I'm pretty sure I stopped at green lights.

It really was a shocking, weighty, joyful, terrifying responsibility, is one of those things that you're terrified and yet, you would never give it away. Isn't it the same true for pastoring? Isn't it a weighty, shocking, terrifying, and yet delightful, privileged, honored calling to be entrusted with the care of Christ's precious people? It's terrifying, but you would never give it away. You would never give it away. It is a exhilarating, overwhelming, sobering job, but thank God He has given us the privilege of doing it.

Now, I think we need to be freshly inspired to the privilege of this task so that we are as vigilant as I was, and I'm sure many dads here were on their way home from the hospital. The privilege of the task motivates our vigilance, and we need to be vigilant. Paul is calling these elders to him because he wants them to be vigilant. He wants them to remember the privilege, the sobriety of their calling, so that they don't grow apathetic, so they don't drift away from that sense of earnestness and value and privilege and sobriety and exhilaration.

He wants them to retain that pastoral zeal for the care of God's people. I was reminded of that precious phrase that the Lord Jesus says to Peter after he rose from the dead in restoring Peter, "Peter, feed my lambs." I love that phrase, feed my lambs, just the tenderness of the savior, the love of the savior, the sweetness of His view of His young, precious people. He says to Peter,

"Feed my lambs," whereas Paul might have put it, "Pay careful attention to the precious people of Christ. Pay careful attention to them."

We're going to look mostly at the exhortation this evening in verses 28 to 32, but just for the sake of the context, I thought it'd be helpful to just walk through some of the overarching themes. It's good to know this whole passage, this whole speech really is a treasure trove for pastors. We don't have time this evening to walk through all of the details, even of just the exhortation. The example is rich indeed, and I want to commend to us the frequent biographical sketches of the Apostle Paul that we have throughout the New Testament.

They really are given to us like diamonds scattered across the pages. We shouldn't just run over them quickly. These aren't pieces of leftover paper. These are diamonds of biographical description meant to inspire us of what it means to be a faithful pastor. Now, we're not called to have Paul's authority or to travel the way he did. Most of us, Dave's an exception, but we are called to shepherd people the way Paul did. Paul's example in this passage, which opens and then closes the passage and is even spliced into the middle of his exhortation, is meant to motivate the Ephesian elders in the care of their flock.

Paul is going away, he expects as he makes it very clear never to see them again. He anticipates suffering and separation, and so like a spiritual father, he comes to them and he says, "Remember my example and heed my exhortation." It's worth noting his example because it's marked by humble servanthood, by faithful and courageous teaching of the entire counsel of God by an endurance of trials and suffering, and a zeal that is gladly willing to surrender his own life for the mission of the Lord.

Paul does not count his life of any value or is precious to himself. If only he can finish his course and the ministry he received from the Lord to testify to the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is Paul's heartbeats, and he wants to be the heartbeat of these shepherds, and like a spiritual father, he says, "Carry on sons. Remember what I did before you, go and do likewise, go and do likewise."

Then in verse 28, he turns from the implications of his example to direct exhortation. We're going to break this exhortation into three sections, the command, the warning, and the commendation. First, the commands. The command that we read in verse 28 is that they are to pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the Church of God, which he obtained with His own blood.

Listen, that verse is a treasure chest of pastoral clarity, protection, and motivation. It is a gift to us from Paul to us in a single verse, you have protection, and clarity and motivation, all wrapped into one verse that just tumbles one after another and it's meant to motivate. Let's walk through the different aspects of this command. I noticed at least five of them. First, there is an attitude to the command, and that is one of vigilance. Paul says were to pay careful attention.

There is a watchfulness, an attentiveness, a vigilance, and the point here given the metaphor of shepherd and sheep that run throughout this passage is that a pastor is to keep spiritual gaze on the flock without spiritual apathy or complacency. Paul apparently views apathy and indulgence as a danger for shepherds, who perhaps could be lulled into a false sense of complacency, either based on their experience or their tendency towards sin, or the intimidation of the world, whatever the reason, their vigilance becomes apathy.

He is guarding them with his command, their attitude is one of vigilance. That's the definition of what a pastor is. He is watchful. He is a watcher. He is an overseer. He is not an over looker, he is an overseer. He watches. He watches carefully. That's his attitude. Notice also the direction of this command, we are to keep watch on ourselves, and to all the flock, on yourselves, Paul says, and to all the flock.

Paul is saying there is something intertwined here and I don't think his concern on the face of it is their personal walk with the Lord, per se so much as the connection between their personal walk with the Lord and their care for the church. Obviously, he loves these men, he wants them to finish their course well. Certainly, that is president's command, but I think there's a certain intertwining point that he's making here. If you would care for the flock of God, you must watch yourself. If you are called as the pastor and you are not caring for the flock of God, you are not caring for yourself either, because you're neglecting your calling.

There is an intertwining purpose here, he loves them, but he also loves them as those that have been entrusted with the care of God's people. Pay careful attention to yourselves, and to all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Now, this direction of our vigilance, it's crucial for us as a family of churches not to forget. One of the things I am very grateful for about the founding pastors of Sovereign Grace is that they held these twin directions tightly, and they proclaimed them and talked about them and passed them on that we have to have both of these things present.

We will not just be professional ministers, nor will we just be those who are devoted to ourselves and indifferent about the well-being of the flock. No, we're going to watch ourselves, and we're going to watch the flock. We're going to keep a vigilant eye on our own souls and the health of them, the zeal of them, the closeness of them to the cross, and the sheep as well. How are they? How are they doing spiritually?

Now, I think it's good for pastors to remember both of these directions because all pastors are prone, as Jeff said this morning, to drift towards either a professional ministerialism that is indifferent about our own heart or just laziness that is indifferent about the flock. This command allows neither. You have to be vigilant about your own heart. Is it warm towards the Lord? Because if not, your people will begin to notice it anyway, and about the flock lest you be a selfish shepherd who just devours and doesn't feed the lambs. The direction of this command is ourselves and the flock. We also want to notice the commission of this command. The Holy Spirit Paul says has made you overseers. The Holy Spirit has made you overseers. What is the ultimate explanation for a true pastor being a pastor? It is the calling of the Holy Spirit on that man into ministry. Now, we have to be careful with this, especially when a person is aspiring or interested in ministry because this can't be self-determined. I've decided what the Holy Spirit has decided for me to do and be.

This has to be confirmed with the affirmation of the church for a person aspiring to ministry but a true pastor, when we look at it from the other way, has been called by God himself into ministry. This is not, if I can put this carefully, this is not a mere profession to be chosen as if it is one of many. There is a strong sense in which God himself has chosen you for this flock and this flock for you and no less than God himself commissions you for this task.

It's good for us I think as we move into a second and third generation of Sovereign Grace to not forget this idea that God himself commissions pastors and they function in his stead with all the sobriety of having to give account to Him for the wellbeing of the flock. We don't answer finally to popularity polls. We don't answer finally, even to our own self-assessment. We answer finally to God. God has placed pastors into the flock. They will answer to Him. They are commissioned by Him and this is the author of this command.

Notice also the nature of this oversight, the nature of it. They are to pay careful attention and then Paul elaborates and explains in a repetitive way what that means to pay careful attention when he says, "They are to care for the church of God." What is the nature of this attention? Is it just observational? Perhaps you've seen those nature shows, where they have a camera set up and they can

watch animals tearing at each other and you're just observing, oh, note the polar bear and the seal, and you can watch what's happening.

This is not mere observational church oversight. "Wow. Look at those two women tearing themselves to pieces." No, this attention is for the purpose of care. It's vigilance for the purpose of help. It's vigilance for the purpose of guarding, it's vigilance for the purpose of feeding, it's vigilance with a particular concern for the wellbeing of those you are watching. You're watching to make sure they are well. It's more like the watchfulness of a parent when there is a child close to the street.

That's the watchfulness. Pay careful attention to care for because you are ready to go and to serve and to help and to call and to guard and to sacrifice at any moment, to care for. The nature of this is to care for, and the metaphor that flows throughout this passage and really throughout scripture is this metaphor of the shepherd. Listen, we can't lose this metaphor as the overarching defining-- There are other helpful metaphors, agriculture and building and so forth but this is the overarching, this is the heart metaphor, and it has particular pride of place because Christ Himself calls Himself the Chief Shepherd.

To be called a shepherd is to echo the language that Christ uses of Himself and His relationship with the flock, there is no higher metaphor than to repeat and echo what Christ calls Himself towards His people. This nature of our careful attention, the nature of our pastoring being shepherd-like, shepherding guards us, I think, from many other types of leadership that we might be drawn to. A pastor is not a general sending troops into battle. He's not a king ruling over a dominion. He's not even a CEO managing employees for the building of a financial empire. He's not a professor, transmitting information. He's none of those things. He's a shepherd. He is a shepherd. He cares for. They are sheep who must be guarded, led, fed, watered, calmed, healed, called, lived among. Pay careful attention, shepherd. Be a shepherd to the flock of God. This is important to guard us and to keep us on the right biblical track of what it means to be a pastor. Pastoring has always been extremely valuable to us as a family of churches. It must remain valuable and define biblically, that means tethered tightly to this metaphor of shepherding.

This has to be our self-conscious view of ourself. Whatever we think of our gifts or our strengths, maybe we're a great preacher, or a great leader, a great administrator, great evangelist. All those things have to be subsumed under tied to this metaphor of a shepherd. If we're a leader, we're a shepherd leader. If we're a preacher, we're a shepherd preacher. If we're a counselor, we're a

shepherd counselor. If we're good at administration, we're a shepherd administrator. This should shape the nature of our careful care.

John Stott makes this point. He says,

"In our days," which would be even more so now, "in our days in which there is much confusion about the nature and purpose of the pastoral ministry and much questioning, much questioning whether clergy are primarily social workers, psychotherapists, educators, facilitators, or administrators, it is important to rehabilitate the noble word, pastors, who are shepherds of Christ's sheep called to tend, feed, and protect them."

Our watchfulness is the non-glamorous and patient vigil of a shepherd standing guard through the watches of the night, making sure the sheep are led patiently to pasture, making sure that none have wandered off to a ditch and yet not surprised if they wander again. Even willing to carry the weak through long stretches of dry territory, enduring the long hours. Listen, brothers and sisters, this definition has to strap us in to the biblical authority of what we are doing.

I took my sons to a park last year, an amusement park and it was their first real rollercoaster, not the cheesy little train that happens in Dumbo land. This was the first serious thing. Like normal children when they first went, they were terrified going up and down because this was serious speed and there was turning upside down and potential falling out and all kinds of things, but in those coasters what do they have? They have those massive harnesses that would feel like a prison except what you're about to do would be deadly without them.

The same is true for this verse and versus like this, [1 Peter 5](#) is another example of verses like this. What do they do? They're like a harness to make sure you stay on the right track of what a pastoring is. They hold you in place and we might dislike the constraints of them. We might feel like I like what this book says about management and what that book says about teaching and what that says about gathering. That's an interesting way to coach people, but what might happen if we take this harness off and said let's try the adventure of leading a church without the restraints of texts like this. Let's try, what will happen?

They will die and so will you, but if you strap yourself into the text. Is it restraining? Yes. Does it keep you away from some of your maybe more earthly impulses? Yes, it does, but it allows you to go on the rollercoaster of pastoring with all of its highs and its lows. Its speed and slow crawls safely

chained to the track of God's authority. Pastors, we can't stand and preach on Sundays about being tethered to God's word and not tether ourselves to His word about pastoring. In no case is that more true than in the motivation of this command. You're to pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit made you overseers to care for the church of God. It's God's church. There's one way that opening illustration breaks down, and that is that's my child but in a more precious way than that is true. These are God's people. These are God's people. Nobody else was driving that car home but me. For some shocking, mysterious reason, God has said here.

The next motivation makes it even more surprising. "God's own flock which He obtained with His own blood." These aren't just God's people by right of His creation. The way every human being belongs to God. We all belong to God. My children, your children, every person belongs to God. The universe belongs to God. No, these are His by a double rights, not only of creation but more uniquely in this passage, by purchase, by purchase, and not by purchase of some trifold treasure.

By purchase of His own blood, the blood of God, the son incarnate poured out in sacrifice for these wandering sinful sheep like you and me. Brothers and sisters, who is it standing in front of you when you're preaching on Sunday? Who is it sitting across from you in the counseling room? Who is it that you're visiting after they've had a child? Who is it that you're helping to move or helping to coordinate their hospitality or meeting with them when they're suffering? Who is that person? The purchase of Christ himself.

The purchase of Christ himself. The blood-bought purchase of Christ. The person whose sins were the cause of His agony, whose rebellion was the object of His tender care, His outreach, His mercy. Whose rebellions were the reason for His crying out, "Why have you forsaken me?" It was the will of the Lord to crush this one for this sheep sitting across from me right now. Here is the motivation of this command. Brothers and sisters, why do we need to keep close to the cross for ourselves? Because as pastors, we need to remember who this person is, who these people are we're going home to.

There's a collection of blood-bought sheep back in your hometown. God, because He loves them and cares for them in a surprising act of mercy to you and me, has given us the privilege of saying, you pay careful attention to these and you'll want to notice I bought them with my blood. They were hellbound. Now they're heaven-bound. They were condemned. Now they're justified. They were orphans. Now they're adopted. They were barren. Now they have the spirit of God within them.

They had no place wandering in desert waste but He found them a home. They were a desert wasteland and yet He has made them to have rivers of living water flowing out of their soul. Who is it that we are loving with our pastoral care? It is the sheep that were there united to Christ on that cross and for whom He said, "It is finished." Pay careful attention. Pay careful attention. Shepherd well the blood-bought. This is Paul's command and yet, he doesn't want to think they're doing this only out of some spiritual duty to Christ but without any real danger or problems facing the sheep other than perhaps their own apathy. These aren't shepherds that have a token or symbolic role. Paul's going to say. This isn't a token symbolic guard at a museum who's there more as a showpiece so he moves from the command to the warning.

The warning, point number two. The warning. He says, "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears." Paul identifies two dangers in this warning.

One outside the church and one inside the church. There are going to be, he says, fierce wolves, continuing the metaphor that will come in among you, not sparing the flock. The idea is that there are going to be people who want to do harm and are motivated satanical to do harm to God's people, to draw them away from the safety of their pasture and their chief shepherd. They want to draw them away like all wolves would want to do. They are watching for those that are distant from the center of the flock, distant from the shepherd, and they want to pick them off.

They don't want to do this to help them, they want to do this to devour them. Wolves and the grotesqueness of this imagery. This isn't playful time with the neighborly wolf pack. We're meant and I think it's hard for us because we're used to cartoons and we're not living in this world where a devoured lamb carcass might be more familiar. A wild dog coming in, tearing up somebody's goat might be much more familiar. We're not used to that normally. I don't what your neighborhood's like, but normally.

I'm speaking to the Americans. Internationals are like, you guys, come on. Little pets in your cages, you got to watch out for them. I see how it is. I had a friend once that was going to travel to a different nation just to prove the wimpiness of Americans. They said, "Listen, you can't go out at night." He said, "Well, why? What if you have to go out at night?" They said, "No, there's lions.

You don't understand, in this part of the world, there's lions. You can't go out at night."

I said, "Lions, just run to the bathroom and die lions?" That's a little closer to this world. It's a little closer to this world. We live in a shelter. Paul wants us to get into the imagery here. "Spiritually speaking, that's the reality. Not our little gated communities where there's never been a wolf sighting, but that can feel as if that's the spiritual reality because we are physically comfortable. We can think that we are spiritually safe, but we are not. We are not spiritually safe. Spiritually speaking, your church lives in a field surrounded by wolves.

Spiritually speaking, your dear little lambs are feet away and in our culture, clicks away from wolves who will not spare the flock and add to the danger. He says, even from among yourselves, there is the potential for those who were professing to be following Christ, to prove after all that they were not, or perhaps to follow through some season of apostasy in such a way that they harm the very ones they should be fellowshiping with and they draw them away from Christ and away from the flock and so there is this external danger, this ravenous danger.

There is the internal danger of being deceived, either self-deceived or deceived by a false profession of loyalty to God's people so he says, be alert, you pastor, on a ravenous primitive battlefield. That is the nature of our ministry. Every time we wake up in the morning as a shepherd, we enter a ravenous spiritual battlefield in which wolves from without and people who once looked like sheep, but are now looking more like wolves arise and devour these precious lambs, these blood-bought sheep.

Paul says, "Be alert. Be alert to these dangers." I think this is important for pastors to notice which of these dangers they might be more prone to guard against. We all have a tendency, I think one way or the other. Some pastors are very comfortable with the role of being a warrior shepherd, doing battle towards those dangers that are without, and yet, they are sometimes unwilling to address the weaknesses of their own heart or the dangers within their church. They might train the church in a combative mentality that's helpful and vigilant towards the dangers that are without.

Yet, rarely or never address the dangers that are within. There are other pastors who might have a tendency in the opposite direction. They are so uncomfortable with the possibility of being called a hypocrite that they spend all their time addressing things like self-righteousness and the danger of

arrogance and self-deception. They are gentle towards the wolves without. They view every wolf as just someone who's almost eventually a sheep.

Most pastors tend one way or the other, and both need to be guarded by this warning. Listen, the reality is teaching against self-righteousness in the church is not a substitute for warning the church against lies outside the church. Teaching against self-righteousness in the church, which is important, is not a substitute for guarding the church from lies that come in from outside the church.

It is also true that teaching the church about its own sin and dangers is not a substitute for pointing out the reality and the danger of wolves outside the church. A lamb cannot be so self-examining that they are no longer in danger from wolves outside the church. Listen, Paul's kind to God's people in these words. What's God doing? He's caring for His sheep. He's loving His sheep, he's watching over his sheep. What is He doing in these words?

He's saying, this is what the reality is. Pay careful attention, be alert. There are wolves, there are false professors of faith, and backsliding leaders, be courageous towards dangers without and emerging dangers within. Be willing to address both. Watch over the people of God. He reminds them of his own tears. He says, remember, as you think about this alertness, I want to give you once again my own example to motivate you.

What kind of alertness am I talking about? What kind of vigilance? What kind of intention? What kind of earnestness am I talking about? Remember, I did not cease night or day admonishing everyone and how with tears. Paul is no professional pastor. He's no generic preacher, speaking generic messages and then leaving them there and hoping if the sheep are hungry, they'll come find them someday. No, Paul is concerned about these actual sheep, concerned for their actual well-being.

You can see the difference. A pastor who says, "Generally, you should be aware of these dangers in the world, these dangers in your heart." Here's a good, nice message about pride, and yet, has no personal involvement, emotional involvement with their wellbeing. Again, it's another area where I want to make sure we follow in the footsteps of those who came before us in sovereign grace, where there is a personal involvement with the wellbeing of the sheep and not a professional detachment.

We don't need professionally detached shepherds, ministers who have an office and a paycheck and are not concerned where these actual sheep are. Here's a convicting question for me. When is the last time you shed tears about

the wellbeing of the sheep? This is, in some ways, all the more motivating to me because this is just one of the churches Paul's caring for. Most of us aren't called to care for how many churches. This is just one.

Paul's concerned about Antioch's concern. He's concerned about Jerusalem, he's concerned about so many different churches. Yet while he is here, he is so earnest that they would be warned and guarded and admonished and kept from danger and kept inside the flock and close to the Chief Shepherd that he is weeping as he admonishes them. You can imagine him saying, "Please, please put on the full armor of God, walk by the spirits and you will not indulge the desires of the flesh. That there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Don't you dare believe the condemnation of the law. Do not go backwards into trusting your own righteousness for salvation."

Weeping as he preaches. Brothers, we must warn with tears. Earnest for the wellbeing of God's blood-bought people. Paul reminds them of His earnestness. It reminds me of what he says to Timothy, to watch your life in doctrine closely. For in so doing, you will save both yourself and your hearers. John Piper says this, "The elect will love the word of God. The elect will grow. The elect will repent, and the elect will most assuredly be saved," That is true, "but they will not be saved apart from faithful teaching.

God has ordained that there be pastor-teachers not only for the purpose of edification but also for the purpose of salvation. That though all credit and all grace for salvation finally goes to the Lord, he has chosen to use the means of shepherds to preserve to the end those that He is interceding all the way into Zion. Oh, that are preaching might have the flavor of eternity in it for eternity is at stake every week." It continues elsewhere, "Oh, how earnest we should be in attending to ourselves and the soundness and helpfulness of our teaching. It is the job of the pastor to labor so that none of his brothers and sisters is destroyed."

I think if we fill up to the task of this vigilance, we haven't really studied Paul's example. Listen, if we're reading to this point in [Acts 20](#), and we're basically checking off self-commending marks, we need to read more of Paul's example. Nobody in here should be reading and thinking, "Yes, I feel like that's me. Just put that in my office and then just write, "thank you" on the bottom of it."

No, we should be feeling a certain sense of that moment when that child is in your hand and you're thinking, is this possible? Paul, are you listening to yourself? It's us. Don't we feel the same way? If you listen to your own

preaching, I have. Have you ever thought about moments? You're trying to counsel somebody and gets to the end and you think, "I don't even know what I just said."

I remember hearing a story about a pastor one time that was preaching and there was a person that came up to him after the message and said, "While you were preaching, my eye wandered away to this other section on the page and God really met me."

We should feel weak at this point in the passage. If we don't feel weak, we're proud. We haven't studied the cross enough and the purchase price of these lambs, we've become hardened to their value. If we're feeling self-confident at this point, we should be terrified. Let any who stands take heed lest we fall. Paul knows that. He comes to the shepherd that at this point ought to be on his face for his apathy and his weakness and his inability and unworthiness, he brings final points that I'll make this evening, at least, his commendation.

Verse 32.

"And now I commend you. Now I commend you to God and the word of His grace, which is able, which is able to build you up and give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I commend you to God's and the word of His grace, which is able."

Yes, it is. Brothers and sisters. Yes, it is. Yes, it is. Yes, it is. I love the fact that [Acts 20](#) is in Acts, is in Acts because we tend to think of acts mostly in terms of church planting and reaching the lost, and breaking the boundaries of the gospel to the ends of the earth, but here is [Acts 20](#) about shepherding and care and watching for wolves. What's the connection?

Look, this isn't a pit stop on the mission. It isn't as though Paul was humming along with this unstoppable gospel. Then he says, "Wait, just time out for one second. Bring the team over. We have a wound." No, this is a part of the unstoppable mission of God and the word of His grace. The unstoppable mission of God and the word of His grace is fulfilled in and as shepherd's care for God's people because they are not just going to be saved. They are going to be saved to the uttermost.

That's going to happen as God and the word of His grace coming through the mouths of very imperfect and weak shepherds who are also blood-bought sheep, pour out the savior's own love on those sheep and preserve them from the wolves of their own hearts and the world until they come to see Him face-to-face in that inheritance in heaven. That is good news for the weary pastor.

Do you have a calling to pay careful attention? Are you able to do that? No. Not in your own strengths. You're a lousy shepherd.

Man, I can't wake up when I want to most mornings, let alone keep awake for the flock. He says, "I commend you." To who? God and the word of His grace, which is able-- What do you do if you're a shepherd in that position? You're never coming back, never ever? What do you do if you're that guy or you're me or you're you? What do you do? You say, "Paul, you just handed this to me. I can't take care of this. The sign on the door says emergency. That's exactly right. That's what this is. I'm going back in there."

What are you talking about? Then what does he say? You have all you need, God, the one who called you in a mystery to care for his people will care for you and them as you try to care for them. God, the one who called you to watch them, will watch over you and them as you watch them. By the way, the instrument, the means of His preserving power, to the uttermost power is the word of His grace. He has given you the gospel so that as you and they stay close to that unstoppable word of grace, just as it's breaking boundaries around the world, it will also break the impossible task of weakened, imperfect and sinful shepherds somehow able to preserve their hearers so that you lousy shepherd.

Guess what you get to do? You get to be the means, the very hands of the savior himself who will hold you up and will preserve you and you get to be the mouth piece of the word of His grace to those sheep so that somehow when they get to the end, here is the shocking truth. God will say, "Thank you for caring for my sheep." I don't know if He'll say thank you. That's probably the wrong way to say it, but He'll say, well done. You and He will both know. "Lord, you did it all. You did it all. You know what a lousy shepherd I am."

That's why Peter said, "Lord, you know all things." "You know that I love you. That's all I got." "Well done. I'll take them back now. Well done." He gives His shepherds and their sheep an inheritance of Himself along with all those set apart unto God, their Gods, shepherds and their Gods, sheep and His word, and His power working somehow through weak and imperfect shepherds will get them to Him. About 20-something years ago, before I was a pastor, but I wanted to be, I was at a meeting with some folks in the church and just somewhat randomly, a woman in the church came up to me and it seemed that she had to tell me something.

They just gotten some terrible news. They had one child if my memory serves me, who had this debilitating, I think it was a genetic disease, and then they

just got news that a second child had the same thing. I had always wanted to be a pastor. My father was a pastor. I loved pastors. I loved the men in this room. In that moment, it was as if time stood still. It was one of those moments where you can feel as if the Lord seems as if He is audibly speaking into your soul.

It was as if He was saying, if you want to be a pastor, this is the rest of your life. She needs you to say something right now. Brothers and sisters, if you're a pastor, if you're a pastor's wife supporting that pastor, if you're here desiring to be a pastor, or if you're called to represent and serve your pastor in your church, God's people need the word of His grace and His power, but it comes through those he has called to shepherd His people, whether they are facing a moment of suffering.

Whether they're facing a moment of temptation and wandering and oppression and guilt and difficulty and doubt, there they are. The voice of the Lord says, "Feed my lambs. Watch my sheep." As we do so, His own power and grace will get that lamb and those sheep to the land where there is no sin or sorrow or wolves or wandering or lousy shepherds, just the Chief Shepherd and we will hear His, well done. Let's pray.

Lord, I thank you for the faithful pastors of Sovereign Grace that love you and love your sheep, and we all thank you for the privilege of this calling, but I thank you also for pastors' wives who faithfully and humbly, and diligently stand by their husbands. Lord, I pray for other leaders in this room who serve in their local church, not as pastors Lord but loving your people and caring for them in their own way. Lord, I pray you would cause us to be faithful Lord to your calling. Call Sovereign Grace to always be a family of watchful shepherds, trusting in your unstoppable grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.