

Lesson 10: How to Be a Good Shepherd!

Text: 2 Timothy 2:23–26

The Church of Jesus Christ is an interesting organization. With all the different personalities and opinions, it is a miracle that the local church runs at all.

God has laid out in His Word what a local church should look like and how it should function. Here at ABC, we are trying to follow a biblical pattern with clear leadership lanes.

Jesus-Ruled

Elder-Lead

Senior Pastor-Implemented

Deacon-Supported

Congregationally-Accountable.

This structure helps everyone in the congregation know their lanes and how best to function in them.

It allows everyone to serve faithfully without confusion or competition, so that the spiritual needs of our people never get overlooked.

But today, I want to focus on the office of **elder** because that is what the focus of the passage we are in is.

In the New Testament, there are five words used for this same office—**elder, overseer, bishop, pastor, and shepherd.**

Each one emphasizes a different perspective of the same role.

The last two capture the heart of it: watching over the people of God and caring for their souls.

The last two, pastor/shepherd are basically the same term with the critical idea of watching over the people of the church. Caring for their needs.

Even the term Overseer indicates the oversight of the Body of Christ which is the people in the local congregation.

No single pastor can meet every need in the body, that's why God designed a team of shepherds.

Our deacons faithfully oversee the practical and financial matters of the church so our elders can stay focused on teaching, prayer, and caring for the flock.

This is the pattern that was set forth in Acts 6 and we seek to follow that same pattern here at ABC.

Our **deacons**, with the help of the **treasurer** and the **office** are knocking it out of the park in the finances and administrative oversight so we elders can effectively teach and care for the people of this body.

You might wonder, what does all of this have to do with today's passage?

Again, we are spending time walking through the second letter to Timothy from Paul.

Paul is in prison awaiting execution for faithfully preaching and teaching the gospel.

He is writing Timothy one last time to not only give him encouragement, but also to further instruct him on how to run the church in Ephesus.

In 2 Timothy 2:23-26 Paul gives Timothy some wise counsel about not just getting men to fill the role of elder/shepherd, but to get the kind of men who will be a good representative of the chief shepherd, Jesus Christ.

The church desperately needs good shepherds.

Men who surround themselves with the sheep of this church.

Men who ***“smell like sheep.”***

Men who are concerned for the lives and the well-being of the congregation.

This is a high calling and one of great responsibility.

And so, Paul's challenge to Timothy and to us as well.

Main Idea: The Church Needs Shepherds; Be a Good One.

Shepherding God's people is one of the greatest privileges and one of the heaviest responsibilities a man can have.

It's not a position you take up for recognition or control.

No, it's a calling to care for people's souls.

The church needs shepherds who love well, lead faithfully, and reflect the heart of Jesus in how they serve.

That's the main idea Paul drives home to Timothy here: **the church needs shepherds—be a good one.**

Paul's words are aimed at elders, but they echo far beyond that office.

Every ministry leader, every parent, every follower of Jesus who influences others should listen closely.

God wants His people to be shepherded by those who carry His heart.

What does it look like to be a good shepherd?

How do you recognize one?

And if God has placed you in any role of influence, what kind of shepherd does He want you to be?

Paul answers those questions in **2 Timothy 2:23–26**.

These verses give Timothy a pattern for shepherding that still speaks powerfully to the church today.

He describes what kind of man can guide people through disagreements, stand firm in truth, and gently lead others toward repentance and faith.

Let's look together at three **qualities of a good shepherd** Paul lays out in this passage.

1. Don't Get Caught Up in Foolishness (v. 23)

2 Timothy 2:23 ESV

Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.

When considering the role of a shepherd or elder in these verses, notice that Paul begins with two negatives.

The first negative or warning is simple, **don't get caught up in foolishness**.

A mature Christian refuses to get entangled in things that have no eternal value.

Satan is clever; he doesn't always attack with heresy.

Sometimes he just distracts with nonsense.

So, Paul tells Timothy, *“Have **nothing** to do with foolish, ignorant controversies.”*

Good shepherds avoid these arguments at all costs because they only breed quarrels.

In Paul's day, these *“foolish and ignorant controversies”* took several forms.

Some teachers obsessed over **Jewish myths and genealogies**, speculating endlessly about Old Testament lineages and angelic tales far beyond Scripture.

Others loved **word battles**, twisting biblical terms to sound more spiritual or sophisticated.

Still others, like **Hymenaeus and Philetus** (vv. 17–18), claimed that the resurrection had already happened, teaching a spiritualized version that denied the bodily resurrection.

None of this promoted godliness—it only produced arrogance, confusion, and division.

Paul’s command was simple: don’t get drawn into debates that distract from the gospel or destroy unity among God’s people.

(Knight, Pastoral Epistles, NIGTC, p. 417; Lea & Griffin, NAC, p. 235; Fee, NIBC, p. 270; Mounce, WBC 46, pp. 526–528.)

If those were the controversies of the first century, ours just have new names and new platforms.

The heart problem hasn’t changed over the centuries.

Online arguments that produce heat, not light.

Some spend hours debating politics, vaccines, or denominational preferences on Facebook.

It doesn’t strengthen anyone’s faith; it divides believers and feeds pride.

Shepherds don’t have time to chase down every comment thread that starts with “*Well, actually...*”

Endless speculation about what Scripture doesn’t explain.

Arguing over who wrote Hebrews or whether Adam had a belly button may spark curiosity, but it won’t produce Christlike character.

Good shepherds keep their people focused on what God emphasizes.

Theological hobbyhorses that eclipse the gospel end up harming the body.

Someone fixates on one doctrinal nuance—Calvinism vs. Arminianism, music styles, or end-times timelines, and treats anyone who disagrees as unfaithful.

Paul isn’t saying stop caring about truth.

What he is saying is stop weaponizing it.

Shepherds guard both the purity of doctrine and the unity of the body.

Church **preferences** elevated to **principles**.

Carpet color, lighting, bulletins vs. church apps...

These are not matters of conviction but of taste.

Wise shepherds don’t let small preferences divide people who share the same gospel.

Social-media outrage over every cultural issue. Every week brings a new controversy, and Christians feel the need to react.

A faithful shepherd chooses his battles carefully, remembering...

Proverbs 26:4 ESV

⁴ Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.

Arguments about who's right instead of what's true.

Disagreements can shift from *"Let's seek truth together"* to *"I just want to win."*

Some people have a visceral need to be right.

They must win every battle and then, in the end they lose the war with their kids, friends, spouse, and church!

Paul reminds leaders that our goal isn't to win debates but to win hearts to Christ.

During World War II, General George S. Patton once stopped two tank commanders who were shouting at each other in the middle of battle. They were arguing over which unit had the right to take a certain bridge—while German shells were exploding nearby.

*Patton jumped out of his jeep, marched between them, and barked, "Gentlemen, the enemy is **that way!**" They snapped to attention, realized their foolishness, and went back to fighting the real war.*

That's exactly Paul's point to Timothy. When believers get caught in foolish controversies, they're fighting the wrong enemy.

The devil is advancing while we waste ammunition on each other.

The church cannot afford friendly fire.

Wise shepherds know which battles matter for eternity and which only distract from the mission.
(Martin Blumenson, *Patton: The Man Behind the Legend, 1885–1945* [New York: Morrow, 1985], 299.)

Shepherds don't get caught up in foolishness.

Instead of wasting time on arguments that lead nowhere and only stir division, pursue what builds up.

Study the Word deeply. Think biblically about every issue.

Speak words that bring grace and peace to those who hear.

Ephesians 4:29 ESV

²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Let your tone be marked by truth, humility, and patience.

When others rush to quarrel, stay rooted in Scripture and respond with gentleness.

And when you're tempted to wade into another foolish argument, remember Patton's words, "*The enemy is that way.*"

We're not fighting each other; we're fighting for souls.

Review:

A faithful shepherd isn't known for stirring up quarrels but for calming them.

Truth and love walk hand in hand, and the shepherd must carry both.

After warning Timothy to avoid foolish debates, Paul now calls him to correct with gentleness that reflects the heart of Christ.

2. Don't Be a Jerk (vs. 24)

2 Timothy 2:24 ESV

²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,

Paul begins with a title that redefines the entire posture of ministry:

"The Lord's servant."

The word *doulos* means *bond-slave*.

A servant doesn't fight for his own rights or reputation, he lives to please his Master.

Everything about his spirit, tone, and reactions should reflect that reality.

Then comes the command:

"must not be quarrelsome."

The term Paul uses (Greek *máchesthai*, "to fight") describes someone who loves verbal combat—a person always ready to argue, correct, or prove a point.

This person just has to be right!

It's the same word used earlier in this chapter (v. 14) when Paul warns Timothy to

2 Timothy 2:14 ESV

...not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.

A quarrelsome man is quick to speak, slow to listen, and eager to win.

Where as James commands...

James 1:19 ESV

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

But the servant of the Lord doesn't thrive on conflict; he restrains it.

He's not easily provoked, not defensive, not territorial.

He's settled in his calling and secure in Christ, so he doesn't need to fight to feel faithful.

His goal isn't to score points; it's to shepherd people.

That's why Paul starts here.

Before a man can lead others, he must first master himself.

The Lord's servant cannot be known as argumentative, reactionary, or combative.

A quarrelsome spirit discredits a holy message.

The **tone** of the teacher must match the truth he teaches.

"But kind to everyone" – The word **kind** (Greek *ēpios*) conveys gentleness and graciousness in dealing with all people, friends, critics, even opponents.

"Everyone" means exactly that.

Kindness isn't weakness; it's strength under control.

It's the same word Paul used in 1 Thessalonians 2:7

1 Thessalonians 2:7 ESV

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.

"Able to teach" – This phrase (*didaktikon*) means more than just having information.

It refers to skill in explaining truth in a way that helps others understand and grow.

A good shepherd doesn't just know the Word, he can communicate it clearly and patiently, even when people are slow to grasp it.

"Patiently enduring evil" – This expression (literally "bearing evil without resentment") pictures someone who can **absorb wrong treatment** without retaliating.

Ministry often brings unfair criticism, opposition, and misunderstanding.

The Lord's servant endures it quietly, remembering how Christ handled Himself!

1 Peter 2:23 ESV

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

The gospel itself is offensive enough; we don't need to add our personalities to make it worse.

A **quarrelsome** pastor, elder, deacon, or church member confuses **courage** with **combativeness**.

Courage stands for truth even when it's unpopular; combativeness insists on winning even when it's unloving.

Paul knew that truth delivered in pride hardens hearts would eventually negate the potency of the truth.

The Lord's servant must model what James wrote: "*Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger*" (James 1:19).

The servant who controls his tongue and temper protects the unity of the church and displays the humility of Christ.

When I was a brand-new believer, I was zealous... okay, let's be honest—I was a jerk.

Let me give you an example of my jerkiness.

My mom's cousin passed away. He was a religious man, but I wasn't convinced he was a Christian.

So, in all my boldness and lack of wisdom, I sent my mom a sympathy card that included this verse:

Hebrews 9:27 ESV

²⁷ And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,

Can you believe I did that?

That was not kind—at all!

Is this verse true? Yes!

Was it the right time or place to share it? Absolutely not.

It may have been accurate, but it wasn't compassionate.

It was jerky.

One hundred percent jerky.

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I look back now and think, **Don't be dumb like I was.**

Truth matters—but how and when we share it matters, too.

Shepherds are called to speak truth with tenderness, not to win arguments but to win hearts.

Elders and those aspiring to shepherd—let’s bring this close to home.

How do you speak to your wife?

How do you treat your children or your grandchildren?

How do you speak to fellow believers?

Is your **tone** gentle, or condescending?

Do people walk away from conversations with you feeling helped—or humiliated?

Do you come across as a know-it-all, or as a servant of Christ?

The Lord’s servant isn’t just defined by what he knows, but by how he treats people.

The same mouth that teaches truth on Sunday should speak kindness on Monday – and throughout the week!

Shepherds model the heart of Christ when they correct with compassion, lead with humility, and speak with grace.

The Lord’s servant is known by his restraint. He guards his tone, controls his temper, and remembers whose name he represents.

A quarrelsome man draws attention to himself; a gentle man draws attention to Christ.

Review:

Faithful shepherds refuse foolish arguments and reject harsh attitudes.

In short, they must not be a jerk!

They lead with grace and truth, reflecting the heart of Christ in how they handle people.

That kind of steady gentleness creates the right environment for God to work.

And that’s exactly where Paul goes next. When we correct others with humility and patience, God often uses that posture to open their eyes and draw them to repentance.

3. Be Gentle and Trust the Lord (vs. 25–26)

2 Timothy 2:25–26 ESV

...correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Paul now describes the **manner** the **goal** and the **result** of correction.

The Manner – *“Correcting his opponents with gentleness.”*

The word *gentleness* (*prautēs*) speaks of power under control.

It’s not timidity, it’s controlled strength.

It’s the spirit of Christ who could calm a storm with a word yet stoop to wash dirty feet.

The Lord’s servant doesn’t correct to crush but to restore.

He remembers that truth shouted in anger may be right in content but wrong in character.

Matthew 11:29 ESV

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

The Goal – *“God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.”*

The goal of correction is not to hurt someone but to help them see truth.

Notice the shift—**God** grants repentance.

The servant teaches and corrects, but only the Spirit can open blind eyes.

That’s why Paul ties gentleness to trust.

We correct confidently, but we rest completely in God’s sovereign work.

When God grants repentance, people see truth clearly and respond with humility.

The Result – *“That they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil.”*

The phrase *“come to their senses”* literally means *to wake up sober*.

Sin and deception are intoxicating; they dull spiritual awareness.

But repentance sobers the mind, it wakes the soul to reality.

Those who once served Satan’s lies are set free to serve Christ’s truth.

Paul’s imagery is vivid: people are trapped in the devil’s snare, enslaved to do his will.

And God, through a gentle, faithful servant, rescues them, not by force, but by grace.

Paul's reasoning is simple: **God's truth must be delivered in God's way.**

The manner of correction either strengthens or sabotages the message.

A harsh spirit may win an argument, but it will lose influence.

A gentle spirit may seem weak, but it opens the door for repentance and restoration.

Gentleness, then, is not weakness, it's spiritual power under control.

It's the posture of someone who believes God is strong enough to change hearts without human hostility or manipulation.

That's why Paul connects gentleness to the hope of repentance in verse 25: *"God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth".*

In other words, the servant's gentleness becomes the environment where God's Spirit does His work.

This is a crucial distinction.

Harsh correction produces defensiveness.

People dig in, justify themselves, and resist the truth.

Gentle correction produces openness.

It disarms pride and invites conversation which leads to conviction.

That's why the Lord's servant must embody both **truth and tenderness.**

Truth without love is cold and harsh.

But truth spoken in love with patience, humility, and kindness, reflects the Savior who corrected His disciples, rebuked sin, and yet said, *"Come to Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart."*

For shepherds, this means our goal is not to prove we're right. Instead, it is to help others become right with God.

Think about one of the most familiar stories Jesus ever told — the story of the prodigal son.

A young man rebels against his father, demands his inheritance, and walks away from everything good and wise in his life.

He wastes his money, ruins his reputation, and ends up feeding pigs in a foreign land.

Finally, starving and humiliated, he comes to his senses and decides to go home.

Now picture the father.

He's been hurt, embarrassed, maybe even publicly shamed by his son's rebellion.

He has every reason to lash out, to say, "I told you so," or "You made your bed, now lie in it."

But when he sees his son a long way off, what does he do? He runs to him, embraces him, and kisses him.

He doesn't lecture him. He doesn't lead with correction. He leads with compassion.

And that gentle, grace-filled welcome is what melts the son's heart.

That's the same picture Paul paints in 2 Timothy 2. The Lord's servant corrects opponents with gentleness, trusting that God will use that spirit to bring repentance.

The father's kindness didn't excuse sin. Instead what it did was it created the atmosphere where repentance could take root.

Gentleness doesn't mean you ignore truth; it means you imitate the heart of the Father, whose kindness leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

That's the heart Paul calls every shepherd to have. The father's gentleness didn't ignore truth; it opened the door for it.

When we lead, teach, and correct with that same spirit, we create space for God to work repentance in others.

The Lord's servant doesn't force change—he trusts God to bring it.

Our part is to be faithful and gentle; God's part is to awaken hearts and set captives free.

When you need to confront sin or error, do you lead with gentleness or with frustration?

Ask yourself: Am I correcting to restore, or just to be right?

Before you step into a hard conversation, pray, *"Lord, help me speak as Your servant, not as their judge."*

Remember: gentleness doesn't mean silence; it means self-control under the Spirit's direction.

Review:

This is what true ministry looks like—not quarrelsome, not harsh, but gentle and confident in God's power to change hearts.

And that kind of gentleness doesn't come from personality; it comes from proximity to Jesus.

The more we walk with the One who is "gentle and lowly in heart," the more His character becomes ours.

As Dane Ortlund reminds us, *“Jesus is not trigger-happy. Not harsh, reactionary, or easily exasperated. He is the most understanding person in the universe. The posture nearest to His heart is not a pointed finger but open arms.”* - Dane Ortlund

That’s the heart of Jesus—the same heart Paul calls us to reflect.

Romans 2:4 ESV

⁴ Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

The Lord’s servant simply mirrors that kindness. Our gentleness becomes the stage where God displays His grace, and where repentance takes root.

Conclusion

The kindness of God leads to repentance—and that same kindness should mark every servant of the Lord.

Don’t get caught up in foolishness.

Don’t be a jerk.

Be gentle and trust the Lord.

That’s how the gospel advances. It’s not through arguments or arrogance, but through humble servants who believe God’s truth is powerful enough to work through gracious hearts.

When we respond to others with the same gentleness that Christ has shown to us, we reflect His heart to a watching world.

So, church, let’s lead like Jesus. Let’s correct with compassion, speak truth with tenderness, and trust our gracious God to do what only He can do—grant repentance and set people free.