

“Tough Skin, Tender Heart”

I Timothy 2:24-26

I want to welcome everybody here tonight, especially Benny Youngblood. It's good to have you here for an occasion. It's a worship service. I'm going to kind of sort of preach a sermon. It's also a celebration of two decades of faithful service. And so we're glad to have you here. And we're glad to have some dignitaries here for a service that will consecrate a man we know, love and respect to another office. May I even say a higher office? It's my privilege to bring a meditation that I think fits the man, as well as ministry and church life in general. It comes from II Timothy 2: 24 ff and I want to read it to you. And then I'll pray and tell you why we're looking at this passage. This is God's word.

For now the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone able to teach patiently, enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness, so that God may perhaps grant them repentance, leading to a knowledge of the truth.

Let's pray for a moment.

Heavenly father, we pray you give us ears to hear and a desire to consecrate ourselves to you. Even as we hear about ministry. And Lord, there is a focus on Pastor Youngblood today, but give us all we pray, the ability to hear what you would say to us, whatever the state of our maturity or the way in which we serve the church.

We pray in Jesus name, Amen. And you may be seated.

So my theme is tough skin, tender heart. Or if I want to put it in a sentence, I would say pastors need tough skin, thick skin, and a tender heart, and pastors need to be tough and tender. I kind of think that fits. Benny, I'm not going to talk about you much, brother, but just a little bit. Just a little bit.

We have a pastor who models, I think, for us, the tenderness. And yet also the toughness is necessary to be a minister of the gospel. We need to be tough because church work is hard. Now, you are a good group of people. This is not a complaint about you. You're the evening people after all. You're the nice ones. Just kidding.

Ministry is hard, and it's hard for a lot of reasons. I'm going to name some of them first.

The first reason came to me one day, eight or ten years ago. By now, I was done speaking to a group of pastors in Saint Louis. I'll say 40 pastors were there, and after I was done giving a talk or two, there was a Q&A time and one of them an elder, not a pastor, an elder who'd showed up said, what is the greatest problem for pastors today? Not the church, but for pastors today?

And I replied unexpectedly, I didn't know the question was coming. I said, the hardest thing for pastors today is internal opposition from people within the church who would like to attack pastors and destroy the church if they can. And the group groaned collectively, not because every one of them was experiencing that at the moment, but because they'd all experienced that at some point in time. And you have to be tough. You have to be tough. When a full blown antagonist comes after the church or a leader of the church, they're rare. They're the worst, but they exist. That's the first reason you need to be tough.

Reasons two, three, four, and five are easier. Pastors need to negotiate churches like this that are full of opinionated and successful people, who hear what you have to say and say. I have a better idea, and it has something to do with their background and what they learned as a metallurgist or as a marketer. It's kind of germane, but it doesn't really have as much weight as they think. And so you have to work with people who think they know better than you, even though you know they don't.

Third, you hope this church is really good about not doing this very often. I just want to commend you. But globally speaking, globally speaking, there are some churches that hold every pastor accountable for every last thing that went wrong in the church in the last six months. Somebody was mean to their child in Vacation Bible School or the nursery. It's the pastor's fault in some places. Not here. Praise God, keep up the good work.

Number four, pastors have to initiate change and most people don't like change. Set simple.

Number five pastors are flawed. They're sinful. They get lazy. They get depressed. They don't come through. They fail by their own standards. And we have to deal with it. And one way of looking at it is to say we have to be tough and tender with ourselves. By which I mean you have to be tough with yourself and tender with yourself, because no pastor has all the skills that are needed to lead the church, the skills that are needed to lead God's people, our prophet, priest and king.

And there's only one person who held all three offices a prophet, priest and king. And that's Jesus. In fact, it's a really short list of people who held two offices, even informally. Melchizedek was a priest and a king. Moses was a prophet and a kingly leader. David was a king, and he lived a prophetic life because he wrote 73 Psalms.

And that's pretty much the list of people even held two offices, let alone those who hold three, which is none. And so we hold one office, which means we're not skilled, really skilled at any more than one thing, maybe pretty good at something else. And almost competent at something else. Now, here's a word for all of you prophet, priests and king.

I'm gonna ask you if you would give yourself a two hour test. What would you do if you had suddenly two free hours for ministry? What would you do? Would you. Would you think, I'm

going to prepare? I'm going to prepare a lesson for my group. I'm going to prepare a study or something to share with a friend or disciple somebody, or teach a Sunday school class of 50 people, or preach a sermon.

I'm going to spend two hours. Suddenly I have two hours. I'll do that. Second person, what would you do? The answer is what I would do is get organized, organize a ministry that's in disarray. This gentleman right here, he's not here anymore. Where'd you go? But he parks that guy right there. And the guy next to a map. More. And maybe even the guy next to him, and maybe even the guy next to him. Two would say, let's get organized. They're kindly. And then there's another person, and it might be Benny Youngblood, who would say, there are some people who are hurting right now. I need to pray for them. There is somebody in the hospital, somebody who lost a loved one, and it's just on my heart. And I gotta go and minister to them on my knees or in person. And that's a priest, prophet, priest, king. The church needs prophets, precinct kings. It needs teachers. It needs leaders and needs caregivers. And nobody's good at all. Three. And we have to be tender with ourselves to not expect ourselves to be perfect. And we have to be tough to face the fact we're not good at everything. We need toughness and tenderness simultaneously.

Now the Bible tells us in Romans chapter 13 one, let everyone be subject to the governing authorities. That's a global command. We take it as a command about political leaders, and it is, but it's actually global, that is to say, people who govern in the workplace, people who govern in commerce, people who govern educationally, people who even govern in the church. Which means that pastors need to be tough enough to lead and to say, you know what? I'm your leader. Follow my lead. Now, when you do that, you have to be gentle. You have to be tender. Because if you start ordering people in the round in the church, we follow a Lord who is tender. And so when we're too tough, people feel something is a little bit amiss.

What did our text say? The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind, kind to everyone, able to teach patiently enduring evil. That's toughness. Correcting his opponents toughness with gentleness. That's tenderness. We need to be tough and tender because toughness corrects people. You need that. And tenderness persuades people so that they may perhaps repent and come to knowledge of the truth. Tough regarding sin, tender regarding the heart. Why? Because the Lord is tough and tender with us. Jesus. Jesus was tender. Doesn't use that word, uses the word compassionate. Jesus was compassionate. Jesus saw the crowds scattered, helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. And it says he felt compassion for them. That's Matthew 936. He felt compassion for the crowds because they're harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Hebrews says Jesus is able to sympathize with us in our weakness. Jesus requires us to be tender to Apostle Paul. So be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as

Christ forgave you. That's tender. Put on compassion and kindness and patience and love. And yet Jesus is also the epitome of toughness. How tough is Jesus? He's really tough. He fought the great foe of his family. He crushed the head of the serpent, our great adversary. He silenced the accuser. He went to the cross knowing exactly what price he would have to pay. Jesus is as tough as it gets and as tender as one can possibly be. What is Hebrews 12 say? It says, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Jesus was as tough as it gets, and if he did it so, we would not grow weary so that we would be tough with him. When Jesus said, he's going to the cross, which he did any number of times, he also said, take up your cross and follow me, because he's tough and he wants us to be tough. How tough? A man came to Jesus one time and said, Jesus, I'll follow you wherever you go. Jesus said, really? That's my interpretation, really. Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nest, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. My life, if you follow me, your life is going to be harder than a fox that lives in a hole, harder than the life of a bird.

Never has a roof over its head. I know their feathers, but still.

Paul, like Jesus, endured suffering. He was beaten, lashed, imprisoned, stoned, shipwrecked, betrayed, hungry. And then he adds this little comment. And besides all that, there is the daily pressure of my anxiety for all the churches, a good anxiety, and I know Benny and all good pastors have a good anxiety for the people under their care who are suffering a love of the church that makes them possessors of a godly anxiety, a godly desire to see people do well. Bible tells us, be strong and be courageous. Says it a bunch of times in Joshua chapter one four times in a short span of time. Be strong. Be courageous. Paul says, be willing to suffer as a soldier of Christ. He says an athlete is not crowned unless they compete according to the rules. You're like soldiers. You're like athletes.

And as hard as that is, as hard as ministry is, as hard as the call to follow Christ is, I have to tell you a secret about ministry, and that is that God doesn't remove from pastors any of the ordinary burdens of life. Their cars break down.

Just like everybody else's car breaks down. One of the best students I've ever had planted a church. He was a campus minister, greatly successful, planted a church in his town, and he called together his former students and put together a marvelous team and thought, this church may grow. And it did. It went from started with about 100 people, and it got all the way up to 2000 people's biggest church in in his small city.

And he had a team to distribute. He had all kinds of plans. He didn't preach all the time, and everybody made sure they took a day off all the time. Everyone did everything they could to make sure they wouldn't burn out. At the age of 52, a genetic disease, it was hidden in his body emerged. And for the next eight years, he was in agonizing pain.

He did everything right. He did everything right. And God did not remove that thorn from his side. Apostle Paul, besides being beat and tossed in jail and accused, suffered shipwreck three times. I'm just thinking, if I'd been Paul after two, I would have said no more, please. I mean, I get it, I have to endure it. Everybody else endures.

I'm still around a lot, but really, two shipwrecks. You gave me two shipwrecks. And then. Oh, here's another.

When I was in ministry, I had a really good time for a while in the church. Kind of like Briarwood that I pastored. But then there was a period of time, a two year period of time in which these are just a sample of things that went wrong. So one of my children got married and hoped to have children and could not get pregnant. And then she got pregnant and had two miscarriages in a span of six months. Then, my youngest daughter got married and after about a year and a half, her husband said, I'm moving to Australia and you're not coming with me. I'm changing my phone number. I'm changing my credit cards. You will not find me you. If you try to find me, you will fail and I'm leaving because I just don't want to be married, period. And he was gone. Then to number three. My buddy got a brain tumor. He was going to serve the Lord in the church -- that he was 72, 73, 74, however long it could be. But he was 66. He got a brain tumor, and he survived it. And he had double vision and dizziness the rest of his life. And he was gone.

And then my kids went to a church of about a thousand people because I was dumb enough to recommend them for it. They called me up and said, dad, do you know any people that are ready to lead a church of a thousand people? I said, this is probably the most self damaging thing I will ever say. And I named my guy. He left, but I had three more pastors left. I mean, I had seven, but I had three that were really good and they were so gifted that three of them went off to get PhDs in a span of ten months. So I lost three more and then same period of time. And then a man had been on my staff for a really long time, fell into a serious, serious moral sin, which we had to address. And when we did, a whole bunch of people got really mad. How dare you call that man to account? I said, we have to call him the account. We have no choice here. They were mad. They wanted to cause a lot of trouble. It's not easy to be a pastor. And he could ask the question, how could this happen to me? What am I going to do? And I'm going to tell you what we do is we go to the slums. We're going to put Psalm 13 up here for a moment.

Psalm 13 tells us that when things are difficult, we continue in the ministry and we pour out our anguish to God. The first thing we do when things are hard in ministry is we lament. We don't.

We don't just say, I'm tough. We say, Lord, this is hard. This is the words that the psalmist used. He said, how long, O Lord, how long will you forget me?

This is hard and you're not coming through. Why don't you answer my prayer? Will you forget me forever? I mean, I know you forgot me, but will you forget me forever or just for a long time? Because I feel like you've forgotten me here. How long will you hide your face from me? You are hiding your face. How long are you going to do that?

When will you stop? How long must I take counsel? My soul, that is. How much? How long do I have to amuse and look within and find counsel for myself and not from you? Because you've hidden your face and have sorrow in my heart all the day. How long shall my enemy be exalted over?

That's tough and tender. I'm tough enough to face how hard it is. And tender enough to say, Lord, help me. And then verses three and four, as he keeps on praying, God begins to answer. He begins to feel it. His prayer is no longer how long you're turning away from me, but now answer me. He's more confident somehow.

He says, consider an answer me, O Lord my God. Light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, I, I now have confidence that you are hearing my prayer, and my prayer is give me a life again, lest my enemy say, I prevailed over him. You're my enemy used to crush me, and now I'm saying I have hope, I have confidence you can silence the enemy, lets my foes rejoice because I'm shaken.

And then somehow we don't know how. The psalmist receives the answer from God. Maybe six months later, maybe three years later, we don't know. But the answer came. And he said, but I have trusted in your steadfast love, that undying, unbending love of God. My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because not he will, but he has dealt bountifully with me. It takes toughness to persevere and tenderness to keep on praying.

Now, this is a word for pastors and Christian leaders, but I want to make sure you know this is a word for everybody because in Matthew chapter 12, Jesus addresses the need for everyone to see our weakness and to take our weakness to God and ask him to cure it.

Matthew chapter 12 Jesus heals a man with a withered, withered hand. he did it on the Sabbath day. And the Pharisees tradition says you can't heal people that are about unless they're about to die. And if you have a withered hand, you're not about to die. And so they're angry with him. As always, it seems. And Jesus cites Isaiah and comments on it as a way of answering their anger at him.

Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased, and I will put my spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel or

cry aloud. Jesus is not going to quarrel with the Pharisees, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets a bruised reed. He will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench until he brings justice to victory in his name.

The Gentiles hope. I have to admit that I'm partly reading this because it makes me think of people good pastors like Benny. And Benny and Jim who are tender with people. A bruised reed. He will not break. There's a man named Richard. Seb's a great Puritan, lived in the 17th century. He wrote a book about this verse. A bruised Reed is the name of the book.

He says, you know, a reed is worth very little. They grow by the thousands and marshes you can you could use them in those days to make a poor sort of pen. They're worth a little something. But if the reed that you make into a pen that you dip into ink is, is bruised, if it breaks, if it's, you know, flopping, it's worthless.

So even a, even a good reed is fragile, but a bruised reed is worthless. And yet Jesus will not break a bruised reed, and he will not quench a smoldering wick. Not a good wick, not a wick this burning brightly, but a smoldering wick. That's how tender he is. Seb's goes on to say, it's vital to understand that when Jesus says this, he's talking about us.

We are all bruised reeds. Jesus, he says, compares us to weak things. Have you noticed among the birds we are doves, not eagles. Have you noticed that among the animals we are not lions, we are sheep. And among plants we're reeds that are bruised and wicks that are smoldering. If we cannot see that we are bruised. Seb's goes on to say, May the Lord show us our true condition, because we will never come to maturity unless the Lord shows us we accept our immaturity, unless we see our weakness and are strong enough, tough enough to face that and take it to God.

Now, sibs and now it's sibs and me. So there are different ways to be a bruised reed. You can be a rebel and a skeptic and far from God, a dullard who has no interest in eternal things. You can also be bruised as a believer when you falter, as David did in his many sins, or as Peter did when he denied Jesus three times.

You can also be a bruised reed because of disappointment. You know the story of the King of Israel, a godless king. Jehoiakim getting a hold of the manuscript, a scroll that Jeremiah had written his prophecy on, and he built a fire. And then he took a knife and carved it up. This is in the days before computers backing up your words, folks.

And he carved it up, and he threw it in the fire bit by bit. That's bruising.

When this happens, we have to learn to be tough and tender. Jesus is tough. He took on flesh and blood that through death. I'm quoting Hebrews again that through death he might destroy

the one who holds the power of death. And Jesus is tender. Jesus is tender. Hebrews two also says, therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every way, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a propitiation for the sins of the people, for he Himself has suffered when tempted.

Therefore, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Jesus is tender enough to know how hard our life is. He empathizes with us. We do not have a high priest. A little bit later, Hebrews says, who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who has in every respect and tempted as we are, and yet without sin.

Let us therefore, with confidence approach the throne of grace, because God is strong and he's tender with us. How strong is Jesus? Let us run with endurance. The race is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame. He's tough, he's tough.

It's very important not to overdo our toughness, and it's very important to recognize that sometimes behind our toughness is a sin we need to be tender about, or a folly that we need to be tender about. I'm going to tell you a story about myself, as I've said on a number of occasions privately to people, my father was very hard on me. The ratio of compliments to criticisms was probably well over 100 to 1 negative to positive. I can remember every positive thing my father ever said to me past the age of five. We also moved a lot. We moved a lot, partly because my dad was very talented but he had other flaws. So he'd get a job and lose a job and we would move. He could always find a job. And so I was the new kid a lot. And when you're the new kid, you have to prove yourself every time you go to a new school, especially if it's small towns which we tended to live in. And if you're criticized a lot by your dad, you have to kind of prove yourself to show your dad wrong, even after he died.

To be honest. So from 1970 7th January till December 1981, just a month shy of five years, I earned a master's divinity, another Master of Theology completed all my coursework and all the comps and all the language for a PhD in five years. Less than five years. You're really not supposed to do that, especially when you're newly married.

And I was doing it to be tough, but I had to see myself with the eyes of tenderness to say, you need to stop doing that. You don't need to prove yourself to your dad. You don't need to prove yourself to those kids in fourth grade or sixth grade or seventh grade or 10th grade when you moved every time the Lord has accepted you, the Lord loves you.

You don't need to prove yourself. God receives us as we are. God is tender with us. God is tender with us. And we don't have to be so hard on ourselves. Now listen, a pastor and Benny

knows this. I chose this for him. I chose it for all of you. But Benny Youngblood is tough and tender. That's what I see.

He has views. He states them, but he's really tender with people. If you be tough and tender, tough enough to tell the truth, tender enough to tell it gently and lovingly and kindly and patiently and pray for the person you're telling the truth to that that person will receive it. Because that's the life of leadership. It's the life of our Lord Jesus.

Jesus was tough enough to take the cross, endure the shame, and strong enough to receive it all. Trusting God. And he was tender enough to weep over Israel as he entered the city for the last time. Oh, Jerusalem! Jerusalem! He wept. I've long to gather you under my wings. Jesus, tough and tender. Paul risking his life, sailing the seas, enduring shipwreck, loving his people, bearing their burdens.

It's hard to do both. When life is hard. We want to be tough. When life is too hard, we want to be tender and soft and give up. Toughness is less tiring in the short run. We need to be tough and tender. The Lord is kind, he's compassionate and he's strong and he's mighty to save. And therefore we are strong.

We are tough and we are tender. Pastor Youngblood, we are thankful that you are tough and tender.

Let's pray for a moment. Heavenly father, we ask that as we behold Lord Jesus, your work, your life, we will see how very strong and fearless you were and are now strong. You are to tell the truth to us. And Lord, for that reason we're strong to tell the truth and label sin. And yet, Lord, tender and kind, because people stray from the truth for all kinds of reasons, because they're under a burden. It's too great to bear because they've been betrayed or abandoned, or just stunned by the blows of life. And so, Lord, make us tender before you heal us bruised reeds and make us strong to follow you. Come what may in this life the speak your truth according to our place in life. Come what may. By your spirit we pray that you would do this in us.

In Jesus name, Amen.