



Theme: Lighting the Way – Paul’s First Letters
“Strong Hearts”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber on...
September 25-26, 2021

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

Weekly Memory Verse:

¹² And may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow, just as our love for you overflows. –
1 Thessalonians 3:12

VIDEO Sermon Bumper

SLIDE “Strong Hearts”

I was a youth pastor for 10 years before I started preaching and leading a church. Each year I would lead students on mission trips where we served others. I was serving a church in suburban Denver while I was in seminary when I took a group of 25 students and leaders to work on a Native American reservation in Southern California. Our route took us through Las Vegas, and I decided it would be good to spend the night there at a local church. I had never been to Vegas before as an adult and so I asked the custodian at the church where a good place to take the students would be for dinner. He directed me to the Excalibur Hotel because it was at the end of the strip, and it was family friendly.

After dinner the students convinced me to walk a few blocks down the strip and we enjoyed seeing the lights at night and the fountains and some of the interesting characters on the streets. Neil was a freshman in high school and was walking not far behind me when I heard him scream. I turned around and he was throwing a magazine up in the air with eyes as big as saucers, looking at me complete saying over and over again, “I didn’t know! I didn’t know!” I don’t believe they have them anymore, but they used to have these racks of magazines advertising different places you could go for a show or different activities in which you could engage yourself. There were scantily clad women on every page and Neil had no clue what he was fine when he opened them up. He was an avid reader and even a book nerd you might say so he was just curious, but it was pretty overwhelming for 9th grader in the early 1990s!

I had assured him that would be okay and that he was simply like first century Christians living in places like Corinth and Ephesus and Thessalonica. They had scenes like what we experienced in Vegas all around them, and it was difficult to avoid which is one of the things were going to talk about today as we continue our study of 1 Thessalonians, looking more in depth at chapters 3 and 4. Paul is going to encourage those early Christians to have strong hearts in the midst of temptations that will pull them away from God and away from a life which is rich and full. It is very appropriate topics for us today, because while Neil had to open a magazine on the strip in Vegas to see sexually charged images, anyone of us with a cell phone now has access to much more than he witnessed in those few pages. And I don’t see anyone throwing their phones in the air when they run across inappropriate material in today’s world on the web!

Today, we continue in a sermon series on one of the first documents in your New Testament, the letter of Paul we know as 1 Thessalonians. Let’s remember that most scholars believe that this one of the earliest

letters we have. Others may have been written before, but this one of which we have a record and manuscripts and fragments. 1 Thessalonians was written around 50 A.D., about 20 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul no doubt wrote letters before this, but no one saved them. This letter was the first that was kept and passed around between those early Christian communities. Mark's gospel was probably written around 70 A.D., so 20 years later. This letter is only around two pages long on 8.5 x 11 paper with 12-point font, yet it has powerful and profound words for us today.

We learned that Paul was writing to the Thessalonians because he had started this church and he was concerned about the pressure and harassment they were receiving from the community in which they lived. He just left them several months before and he is worried they will lose their faith because of the criticism and hardship they are facing for following Jesus as King and Lord, instead of Caesar. You want to be sure they are okay, which is the main reason for writing his letter.

GRAPHIC Paul's Second Missionary Journey

When you read a letter, it is helpful to know the context. That includes where it was written, who was the author, who were the recipients, and where were they located. This is a map of the Mediterranean and an area where I will be leading a group in October 2022. The Holy Land is on the right side of this map with the Mediterranean Sea in the middle. Paul begins his missionary journey in Antioch of Syria on the upper right of this map, arriving there from Jerusalem. He journeys across Galatia, which is modern day Turkey, makes his way then across the Aegean Sea to what is modern day Greece where he will go to Philippi and then to Thessaloniki, followed by Berea, Athens, and Corinth. He crosses the Aegean Sea one more time to Ephesus and then eventually makes his way back to Jerusalem by crossing the Mediterranean Sea. You can read about this journey in the book of Acts.

GRAPHIC Paul's Second Missionary Journey CLOSE UP

After Paul has preached in Thessalonica for three weekends, he is kicked out of the synagogue. He gathers those who have come to believe in Jesus as Messiah and the house of a man named Jason. Shortly after that, the leaders in the synagogue who are angry at him round up thugs to harass him and those early followers of Jesus. Paul leaves and heads to Berea, which we see on this map as we get a close-up look.

GRAPHIC Berea

He leaves Berea and heads to Athens.

GRAPHIC Athens to Thessalonica

From Athens he turns to Timothy, his young protégé, and send him back to Thessalonica because he is worried that the new Christians will turn away from their faith in the midst of pressure and harassment. Some had even been arrested so Timothy goes to give them encouragement.

GRAPHIC Corinth to Thessalonica

Timothy returns to meet Paul in Corinth and it is from this city which Paul writes his letter that we know as 1 Thessalonians. If you have your Bible, you might get out and turn to chapters 3 and 4 which is where we will be spending our time together today. We read these words at the beginning of chapter 3.

BIBLE

3 Finally, when we could stand it no longer, we decided to stay alone in Athens, ² and we sent Timothy to visit you. He is our brother and God's co-worker in proclaiming the Good News of Christ. We sent him to strengthen you, to encourage you in your faith, ³ and to keep you from being shaken by the troubles you were going through.

Paul writes this letter to encourage them because he knows they are being harassed and he then says these words in verses six and seven.

BIBLE

⁶ But now Timothy has just returned, bringing us good news about your faith and love. He reports that you always remember our visit with joy and that you want to see us as much as we want to see you. ⁷ So we have been greatly encouraged in the midst of our troubles and suffering, dear brothers and sisters, because you have remained strong in your faith. ⁸ It gives us new life to know that you are standing firm in the Lord.

I underlined those words “strong” and “faith”, because these are two main words in this passage and in this book. “Strong” appears three times in this short chapter and “faith” appears five times.

SLIDE Faith = steadfastness, obedience, trustworthy, full of faith.

SLIDE Strong = “to be strengthened”

The idea here is not that we are always strong but that our faith can help lead us to strength. It’s both something he commends the Thessalonians for, and he wants them to continue to live out. As we read these letters, we are asking what they mean for us today some 2000 years later, and I believe Paul is calling us to faithfulness and to know that we can be strong and strength through our faith.

SLIDE Strength is not always something we have automatically but comes as we practice our faith, as we live our faith, and as we hold onto our faith.

In other words, we can’t grow strong in our faith without testing or challenge or difficulty. Today, we are encouraging you to think about volunteering at our thrift store and I find it fascinating that some of the main things that show up as donations are exercise equipment, especially

in February or March after people have given up on their New Year's resolutions. I love this inversion table which someone gave me to give to the thrift store this week. The idea is that it holds you, upside down and it helps you strengthen your abdominal core muscles. While this is a great idea, it's useless when it is dusty like this one! In order for us to grow strong with our physical muscles or our spiritual muscles, we have to use them. Being steadfast, obedience, and loyal to an exercise routine is what strengthens us, and I would argue this is true of our faith as well.

Paul describes why we do this a few verses later at the end of this chapter when he offers them a prayer in the name of Jesus. It captures what he means by faithfulness and what it means to be strengthened. In many ways, he is restating this as the goal of the Christian life, reiterating what Jesus lived and taught. This is our Scripture memory verse for the week and it's a prayer I invite you to pray out loud with me.

BIBLE

¹² And may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow, just as our love for you overflows. ¹³ May he, as a result, make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy as you stand before God our Father when our Lord Jesus comes again with all his holy people. Amen.

There are multiple words for love in the Greek language, but the one Paul uses here is agape, which is selfless kindness. It's not about an emotional, warm, and fuzzy feeling. It's not about romantic or erotic love. Agape love can sometimes be experienced this way, but it is because of a selfless concern for others that these other kinds of love grow out of. Paul is reminding us that to be strengthened in our faith is about allowing for self-sacrificial love from God to fill us, so that we might then offer that servant love to others. This is another way of capturing the great commandment where Jesus reminds us to love God and love others.

I was visiting recently with one of our members planning her mother's funeral that we will hold in a couple of weeks. As she got older, she struggled with several health issues, and she still needed some income to supplement her Social Security, so she took a part-time job at one of our local hotels being the person who provides breakfast for people staying at the hotel. This member of ours has been touched in the past few weeks, since the death of her mother, as people have come to find her at her workplace to let her know how much her mother meant to them serving breakfast. She would always give them an encouraging word and sometimes prayer or a Bible verse and it meant so much to those people staying at the hotel they wanted to seek out that woman's daughter and tell her. Not only did this strengthen her faith as she served others, but it strengthened them, and I thought was a beautiful picture of faithfulness.

As we were visiting more about her mother, there was another beautiful memory she shared about how her mother, even in her retirement years, would ask God every morning to lead her and direct her towards what God wanted her to do that day. Paul wrote about this kind of faithfulness in the beginning of the next chapter in this letter.

BIBLE

1 Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You live this way already, and we encourage you to do so even more.

This is a common theme for Paul as he is writing to those early followers of Jesus, and they should be words that help us to live more faithfully today, living in a way that pleases God. Paul wrote these words in Ephesians 5.

BIBLE

¹⁰ Carefully determine what pleases the Lord.

BIBLE

¹⁵ So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. ¹⁶ Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. ¹⁷ Don't act thoughtlessly but understand what the Lord wants you to do.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:4b he says these words as he contrasts people pleasing with God pleasing.

BIBLE

Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts.

Every day we are meant to ask who it is we are trying to please. I must confess this is a challenging one for me because my personality is that of a people pleaser. Sometimes, I am a me pleaser, focusing on what pleases me. We miss the mark as well we become people pleasers or we pleasers and forget about pleasing God. Ultimately, Paul reminds us, we are meant to delight God and bring pleasure to God, becoming God's pride and joy. How do I live a life worthy of God? How do I live a life of loving God and loving my neighbor? These are different ways at getting at the heart of what it means to follow Jesus and become the presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

I want to suggest to you there is a question we can ask every day which will not only lead us to strong hearts and faithfulness, but purpose and meaning in our lives. Every morning we are invited to wake up and ask this question. When we start with this question, it changes our perspective and how we experience all of life. It takes the focus off of me and my problems and puts them in perspective.

SLIDE

God, what can I do to please You today?

How can we bring delight to God? How can we live in a way that brings God glory? How can we do and say the things that will please God? We have around 1000 people who connect with our congregation each month in worship or one of our small groups, either online or in person. What would happen if every one of us woke up every single day and started with these questions and thoughts?



How can I please God today?



How can I bring delight to you today God?



What would it take for me to bring you joy today?



How can I be faithful to you?



Help me to be faithful and trustworthy in my relationships today?

Help me to live a life worthy of You today.



Help me to act in love towards my neighbors, even those that drive me crazy!"

Can you imagine how this community and the world would be different if every single one of us who called herself a follower of Jesus began every single day with these kinds of questions and affirmations? We would have no room in any of our churches because people would be flocking to be a part of that kind of community. I think most of us are trying to do this, but how awesome would it be if every one of us who calls ourselves a follower of Jesus were to begin our day this way, seeking to please God more than anything else. I remind you again of the words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:12.

BIBLE

¹² We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy. For he called you to share in his Kingdom and glory.

God gives us the world in which we live, the air that we breathe, this beauty that surrounds us on most days, our family and our friends and

other people. God gives us the gospel of Jesus Christ, offering forgiveness and mercy and grace. God walked among us to show us the way, the truth, and the life, and demonstrate what love looks like. God suffered and died and was resurrected to give us hope that the worst thing is never the last thing. In response to all of that, we ask how we might live a life worthy of those gifts and which are pleasing to God. Are we willing to live a life worthy of these gifts? Are we willing to live a life of agape love so we might please God and change the world into God's kingdom?

In 1874, at the age of 38, a woman named Francis Havergal wrote a hymn that we will sing at the close of the service. I love these words:

SLIDES

**Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee.**

**Take my moments and my days;
let them flow in endless praise,
let them flow in endless praise.**

**Take my hands and let them move
at the impulse of thy love.**

**Take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee,**

**Take my voice and let me sing
always, only, for my King.**

**Take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from thee,**

**Take my will and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine.**

**Take my heart it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne,**

**Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee,**

Are we a me pleaser, a people pleaser, or will we be a God pleaser? To whom will we be faithful? How will we be faithful? These are important questions for us to wrestle with today just as they were 2000 years ago.

Today, a common use of the word faithful has to do with marriage. If we are faithful that typically means that we have lived up to the promises we made in our wedding vows to our spouse. Infidelity, which comes from the Latin word for not being faithful, means that we have broken no spouse and not been faithful. We often think of this when it comes to adultery, but having an affair is not the only way of being unfaithful in our marriage. Being unfaithful often is about failing to love someone sacrificial likely promise in our vows. We have failed to care for someone or to bless them. We have failed to practice kindness and instead have torn the other person down. Infidelity is not just physical and see someone who is not our mate. Infidelity is failing to demonstrate agape for someone with whom we have a covenant relationship.

I've done several weddings this summer and fall that were put off for a year or more because of Covid. I have been meeting with couples preparing for that time and when I do I remind them that being faithful for as long as they both shall live is about practicing self-sacrificial love. Marriage is about serving another person and acting like Jesus for them, serving them in sickness and in health, in poverty and wealth. They make a promise that they will be faithful, not just sexually, but also demonstrating selfless love towards one another. Paul is defining this kind of love as the way we treat one another when we follow Christ, especially in our most intimate relationships as he then speaks about at the beginning of chapter 4.

It's important to remember that the people in Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica, and all of Greece lived in a hyper sexualized culture. The addresses that in this next part of chapter 4, tying that to this idea of doing what pleases God and being faithful. He's trying to help the Thessalonians understand what this actually looks like, to be faithful to God, living a life worthy of God, pleasing God, and living out sacrificial love. This is meant to connect to our physical intimacy in our bodies just as it does every other part of our lives. There were some differences in that Greco-Roman world of the first century than today, but some things are also very similar when it comes to sexuality.

It is important to remember that our human body was created for sexual intimacy and God designed us with the ability to reproduce and to have pleasure and sexual urges. These are gifts from God that we read about the very beginning of the Scriptures in Genesis. It is meant to be a blessing from God and in those acts of sexual intimacy God wired our brain to release oxytocin which is the same thing that is released when mothers are nursing babies and meant to bond us with that other person whom we are touching physically.

The problem is when those physical urges connect with our brokenness, what we call in the Christian faith sin, we get messed up and we end up with images on the web that numb our mind and our ability to have appropriate sexual intimacy. I remind you that sin is simply a description of separation or brokenness that happens between us and God, us and others, and us and ourselves. When we can't love others or love God or love ourselves, there is brokenness, there is sin. That happened in our world today just like it did in the first century world of the Thessalonians.

We become not just people pleasers, but me pleasers, and not God pleasers. It becomes all about me instead of being faithful to God or something bigger than myself. We don't think about delighting God or

using this gift of sexuality to bless others, but instead we separate sexuality from the rest of our lives and our faith, and from whom God is and what God's will is for our lives. It's in this context of brokenness that Paul writes these words from 1 Thessalonians 4 to a church in the middle of the culture with very different views around sexuality and intimacy.

BIBLE

³ God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin. ⁴ Then each of you will control his own body and live in holiness and honor— ⁵ not in lustful passion like the pagans who do not know God and his ways.

Paul acknowledges we have these drives which are gifts from God, but they should be expressed in ways that honor God and put God and God's will for our lives, and the lives of others, first. When we do that, then sexual intimacy functions as a gift instead of something which harms others or even ourselves. I know that God understands how strong our drive is for sexual intimacy and physical connection. God understands this because God created us with hormones, but God wants us to live as more than just the tomcat down the street. God wants us to practice our sexuality in light of this greater ethic of pleasing God.

I have shared with you before that my daughter has rats. She has five male rats, and we chose to have just male rats for a reason, because we didn't want to deal with reproduction and rats everywhere! Here's a picture of them and they are actually very cute.

GRAPHIC Male Rats

GRAPHIC Female

Recently, however, my daughter got into an argument with a friend and as part of making up her friend brought over to baby female rats which are very cute but go against arm male only policy in the rat room.

Luckily, they are in their own cage but when we brought them into the room the male rats went into a frenzy just smelling them in the room. I wanted to get out 1 Thessalonians and read to them this Scripture passes we just read. Instead, I read Romans 12.

BIBLE

12 And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. ² Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Oh, if only the rats could understand the scriptures. If only we could understand the Scriptures! How often do we act like those male rats running around the cage getting worked up because of our sexual urges? Paul is reminding all of us, those in the first century and us today, that while giving into our sexual impulses might bring immediate pleasure, we all know it can lead to pain if we are not careful. Paul encourages us to do what is pleasing to God and to recognize our bodies belong to God just like our minds and our hearts and our spirit. It is only when body, mind, spirit, heart, and soul, come together that God begins to transform us that new person by changing the way we think.

While you might have giggled at the rat analogy, can I tell you that in the Greco-Roman world of the first century is not that far off. You see sexuality was about power. Men had power over women. Those who were free had power over slaves, and much of the Roman Empire were enslaved, especially in these larger, port cities. Those who could purchase prostitutes had power over them and could treat them like slaves. Citizens had power over noncitizens and foreigners. Adults had power over

children. This was described as an honor culture or honor society, and the person with a higher honor had power over those who were lower in status or class. That power was often wielded in this area of sexuality.

Dr. Kyle Harper, the historian and Professor of Classics and Letters at the University of Oklahoma, describes this situation in ancient Rome with the following words:

Ancient Roman culture had an almost unbelievably callous set of attitudes towards those without social honor; slaves, prostitutes, children, and foreigners. Systematic exploitation was built into the social and moral order of the Roman world. The Roman order was constructed on the degradation of the bodies of non-persons.

This meant you could do whatever you wanted to your slave, your wife, your children, and your neighbor, male or female, if they were a foreigner or in a lower social status. This was combined with how people worship and the availability of prostitutes in the Greco-Roman temples to make for a hyper sexualized culture where there was misuse of power everywhere and at every level of society. When we read Paul's teaching about sexuality in the context of this culture, it makes even more sense and is even more revolutionary than we experience it today. People misused their slaves, the poor, children, men for women, and foreigners in whatever way they pleased. Before we get too high and mighty about how terrible that is, let's remember that this is how people viewed slaves here in this country in 1800s and how it is that the sex slave trade is still one of the largest and most lucrative industries in our nation, and indeed throughout the world.

Paul is offering a sexual revolution which challenges us to look at sexuality differently than the culture and the way we have looked at it in the past. We are meant to look at it to the lens of agape, sacrificial love. Sexual intimacy was made to be an expression of lovingkindness and lived

out in the context of covenant love, were two people commit to care for each other, serve each other, and bless one another all their days. Yes, it is also for pleasure because it is a wonderful gift given to us by God. Yes, it also is part of the reproductive process for many couples, but it is meant to be more than that. As everything else in our lives is meant to be, sexual intimacy is also to be seen as an expression of selfless love, faithfulness, strong hearts, holiness, and another way in which we can please God.

It's interesting that Paul doesn't give us a list in this text of what is sexual sin. He does say that we should not be controlled by our sexual urges, and then he says that no one should mistreat or take advantage of a brother or sister in regard to sexual intimacy. We should not be taking advantage of our brothers or sisters because the Lord

BIBLE

⁶ Never harm or cheat a fellow believer in this matter by violating his wife, for the Lord avenges all such sins, as we have solemnly warned you before. ⁷ God has called us to live holy lives, not impure lives. ⁸ Therefore, anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human teaching but is rejecting God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

Paul is reminding us that our bodies and our souls and how we experience God are connected, and when we violate others or ourselves, we literally push ourselves away from the one who created. I also appreciate how Paul reminds us that God is the ultimate judge and the Avenger, not Capt. America or Ironman or the Hulk or the Black Widow! I think the reason we love those movies so much is because they seek to write what is wrong and set things back in order and protect those who are being mistreated and abused. We understand this because God wired us this way.

When we take advantage of people with less power than we have,

and exploit others because of their lower status or position, is not just human justice we may face but an angry God. God's anger burns when people are being hurt with our sexuality, or in any other way I would argue. Paul is reminding those Thessalonians that even though their culture says something is permissible, God sees it differently. I can guarantee you that most of the people who were mistreated in the first century did not receive earthly justice, so Paul reminds them that justice belongs to God ultimately.

Our sexuality and our spirituality are meant to be intertwined, and Paul's warning is that when we mistreat others in today's world with sexual harassment or rape or abuse or any other form of exploitation, we will have to come before God and deal with that. There is justice for those who have been harmed and I find this comforting, especially as I have met with families who have dealt with some sort of harassment or exploitation or abuse and not had any resolution in this life through our system of justice. God whined these two things together so that we will understand how painful it is when we are not living lives which are pleasing to God or holy, instead doing things which cause separation and hurt and evil.

We are called as people of faith to have strong hearts, living lives of holiness, and seeking to please God. Paul is reminding us that our sexual desires are meant to lead us to covenant love and that it is in practicing our faith, strengthening our faith, we are able to do that and express sacrificial love to others. Thessalonians were reminded not to visit the brothels or the temple prostitutes or take advantage of their children or slaves or people of lower status, as was acceptable in Roman society. This was beautifully revolutionary in the first century and can be for us today. We live in a world in which sometimes we have separated our physical expressions of desire and love from agape and faithfulness and pleasing God.

God understands our struggles and there is forgiveness and grace

when we fall short, but we don't look at that cheaply. We also should understand from Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians that there is no place in our faith or sexually abusing or exploiting someone because we can't control our desires. This is not in any way consistent with the life of Christ.

Paul concludes this section with these words, summarizing what is to be people of faith who are sexual beings and how to live a life of love, agape, faithfulness, with strong hearts.

BIBLE

⁹ But we don't need to write to you about the importance of loving each other, for God himself has taught you to love one another. ¹⁰ Indeed, you already show your love for all the believers throughout Macedonia. Even so, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you to love them even more.

Your mind them to just keep doing what they are already doing, which is living selflessly towards one another, serving their brothers and sisters, showing agape love.

That brings me back to my first youth group when we were in Vegas. We had so many kids sign-up that year for that trip that I needed to recruit some more leaders to be a part of the youth ministry and help lead to trip. I was pretty good at watching people come and go at church and reaching out to anyone new and snagging them to help with our youth ministry, and I asked the young woman who I noticed had been coming to worship your few weeks if we could have a conversation. We met for coffee, and I asked her if she would be willing to join our youth ministry team and maybe come on this trip with us that summer.

She hesitated before telling me that she didn't think she should do that because I should know that she had been living on the street when she was a teenager and was a prostitute for a short period of time. She

told me about having to leave her home because of abuse from her father and his friends who would come to visit in her bedroom at night. She experienced a very kind of sexual exploitation that was talked about Bicol in the first century. She eventually made her way to a women's shelter that was run by a church in downtown Denver. They helped her get away from her "owner" and eventually finish her GED and then she went on to college and became a social worker. She met her fiancé while in college and they now lived in a nice suburban home in the outskirts of Denver.

As we were visiting, I couldn't help but think about the early church in places like Corinth and Thessalonica and Ephesus, where temple prostitutes were prevalent, and many were probably in the first churches that Paul started. I reminded her of that reality and that when she became a follower of Jesus and gave her life to Christ, the old is washed away and there is new mercy and new life offered. The old and died in the new will rise, this is the promise of our faith. Even though she was a counselor and a social worker and was now rescuing young women from a life she had endured, was hard for her to accept that gift of grace for herself. She became one of the best youth leaders I ever had, and she eventually shared her story with our youth after we had traveled down the strip in Las Vegas.

What I know is that through her faithfulness she became strong, and she blessed and changed the lives of many young people. While we all may not have a transformation story as radical as hers, all of us have broken this that God longs to heal and in doing so we have a chance to strengthen our faith and live as people with strong hearts.

My prayer for each of us today, no matter our story or background, is that we might ask daily: **How can I please God today? How can I bring delight to you today God? What would it take for me to bring you joy today? How can I be faithful to you? Help me to be faithful and trustworthy in my relationships today? Help me to live a life worthy of**

You today.

And in doing that, we might fulfill this Scripture that I hope you will memorize this week. Let's say it together as we close.

SLIDE

¹² And may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow, just as our love for you overflows. –1

Thessalonians 3:12

Let's pray.

SLIDE Prayer

God, we give thanks for those in our lives who have showed us selfless love. We stopped for a moment to lift them up to you today...

They have painted a picture for us of what your will is for our lives. You call all of us to faithfulness. You call us to live a life worthy. You call us to please you. We remember how you asked us to love others as you have loved us. Forgive us God, when we have failed to do that; when we take advantage of other people; when we have lived as me pleasers, or we pleasers, or people pleasers, instead of God pleasers. Forgive us Lord. Help us to be holy consecrated to you. You are our God, and we are your people. So be it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

September 25-26 Order

1. Ely Welcomes people and says, **“We all struggle with how to be faithful in this life. Today we are going to look at how to have strong hearts in all of our relationships, with God and with others, so we can live with purpose and meaning.”**
2. One Song, followed by prayer
3. Welcome and invite people to wave and be seated.
4. Announcements by Jeff (Check News Section on Website)
 - Thrift Shop
 - Financial Peace
5. Invite congregation to prepare their hearts for the message.
6. Video bumper plays.
7. Sermon
8. Prayer after sermon
9. 2 Songs of Worship
10. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
11. Offering SLIDE and Focus: THRIFT SHOP
12. Meditation Moments reminder by Jeff
13. Care Ministers (If any are present)
14. Closing Prayer