

Sermon Series: “Strengthening Your Grip”—Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Westfield, IN—5/5/2002

Title: “Strengthening Your Grip on Priorities”

Text: 1 Thessalonians 2: 1-13

Intro.: *Ills.: scene from ‘Rules of Engagement’ (“We all have our priorities.”)*

Theme: As Christ’s family both in our homes and at our church, committing ourselves to serve Jesus always means that are evaluating our attitudes, motives, and actions so that we keep Jesus’ priorities our priority in our lives.

Our foundations must be biblical and Christ-centered (PRINT AND READ VERSES 1-6a AND 13)

?? Our Christianity is defined by what we do when we are ‘under the gun’ for our faith

1. What would happen your practice of the faith if it became illegal in America, today?
2. Paul’s love, affection, and passion to share the good news with the Thessalonians came in spite of strong opposition
3. In our homes, at our church, in our community, “*we love because Christ first loved us.*” *1 John 4:19–“good news”*
4. ***Sharing of the love of Jesus*** at Lord of Life and in our homes as ***a priority***

?? Our faith cannot be built on gimmicks and props but on the strong Word of God

5. Programmatic Christianity and Personality-based faith is a sham when compared the true power faith
 1. **Deception** — “wandering planet”—always looking from the next programmatic gimmick to religiously entertain
 2. **Impurity** — “dirty” — does not help me to get real with sin and Jesus which is at the heart of our salvation need
 3. **Deceit** ---- “the dole” and “flattery”—giving people cotton candy religiosity
6. The power of our faith is in the Word and its good news of the shed blood of Jesus for our guilt and sin
 1. Paul commends these Thessalonians and Bereans for receiving Word not just a “man’s word” but “God’s word”
 2. **Ills.: Priority in parenting**
 3. ***Spending our time in the Word*** at Lord of Life and in our homes ***a priority***

Our focus must remain other-centered (PRINT AND READ VERSES 7-9)

?? ***Gentle*** in our approach to others (vs. 6b-7)

1. Often we like to “throw our weight around” and hurt our Christian witness and others
 1. Paul uses the word “weighty” (***What does a two ton elephant able to do—anything he wants***)
 2. Out of pride, revenge, lack of sense of self-worth—we smash into each other, demean, drag each other down
 3. **Ills.: Losing Even When You Win**
2. “*But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*” *1 Peter 3: 15*
3. ***Imitation of the gentle and meek Spirit of Christ*** at Lord of Life and in our community a ***priority***

?? ***Giving*** in our eternal care for others’ needs (vs. 8-9)

4. How much are you willing to give up for another’s eternal salvation?
 1. Paul was not only willing to risk life and limb but even his eternal “***soul***”
 2. **Ills.: misplace priorities**
 3. Jesus was willing to lay it all on the line (“*Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” *Romans 5: 7-8*)
 4. If you knew that giving two hours extra a week or \$20 more a Sunday would guarantee someone else’s coming to faith and stance in heaven some day, would you do it? Would you do it even if you weren’t guaranteed?
5. Christian stewardship of our money and time resources is not about obligation (law) but opportunity (gospel)

6. *Making the generous sharing of God's gifts to us at Lord of Life and in our community and family a priority*

Our facade of Christianity must be authentic (PRINT VERSES 10-12)

?? **Ills. Gold between the teeth of God**

?? Our walk must match our talk in terms of righteousness and purity

1. Paul was not tooting his own horn for self-glory, but was demonstrating that his message about Christ was *genuine*
2. Walking in righteousness and purity not something we do for Jesus but because of Jesus (*proves you belong to God*)

?? Our walk must match our talk in terms of blowing a positive spiritual wind into others lives

1. Are you an encourager or a discourager of others?
2. Paul made it his goal to build others up in Christ
3. ***Cheering others on in faith's race and comforting along the way*** at Lord of Life and in our home as *a priority*
4. "*Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*" *Romans 12: 15*

?? ***Making it our priority to live authentically*** as believers in Christ and as children of the Heavenly Father

Rule of Engagement—"We all have our priorities"

(See printout)

Priority in Parenting

Flight attendants give these instructions to airline passengers: "For those of you traveling with small children, in the event of an oxygen failure, first place the mask on your own face and then place the mask on your child's face." In family life, parents often spend most of their time placing oxygen masks on their children's faces while the marriage relationship suffocates. The only way to have a strong family is to make sure that husband and wife keep the oxygen supply of love flowing strong between them.

Losing Even When You Win

Two Kentucky farmers who owned racing stables had developed a keen rivalry. One spring, each of them entered a horse in local steeplechase. Thinking that a professional rider might help him outdo his friend, one of the farmers engaged a crack jockey. The two horses were the leading the race at the last fence, but it proved too tough for them. Both horses fell, unseating their riders. But, this calamity did not stop the professional jockey. He quickly remounted and won the race. Returning triumphant to the paddock, the jockey found the farmer who had hired him fuming with rage. "What's the matter," asked the jockey. "I won didn't I?" "Oh, yes," roared the farmer. "You won all right, but you still don't know, do you?" "Know what?" asked the jockey. "You won the race on the wrong horse!" "There are several horses that we have the option to ride in our lives: One is called "success", but it too can throw us off. Others are called "anger," "jealousy," or "wealth." But, these too can give out and we can find ourselves flying through the air. When we get back on and start riding, will it be the right horse?"

Misplaced Priorities

A group of friends went deer hunting and paired off in twos for the day. That night one of the hunters returned alone, staggering under an eight-point buck. "Where's Harry?" he was asked. "Harry had a stroke of some kind. He's a couple of miles back up the trail." "You left Harry laying there, and carried the deer back?" "Well," said the hunter, "I figured no one was going to steal Harry."

1 Thes. 2:1-13

You know, brothers and sisters, that our time with you was not wasted. ²As you know, we suffered rough and insulting treatment in Philippi. But our God gave us the courage to tell you his Good News in spite of strong opposition.

³When we encouraged you, we didn't use unethical schemes, corrupt practices, or deception. ⁴Rather, we are always spreading the Good News. God trusts us to do this because we passed his test. We don't try to please people but God, who tests our motives. ⁵As you know, we never used flattery or schemes to make money. God is our witness! ⁶We didn't seek praise from people, from you or from anyone else,

⁷Although as apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you. Instead, we were gentle when we were with you, like a mother taking care of her children. ⁸We felt so strongly about you that we were determined to share with you not only the Good News of God but also our very souls. That's how dear you were to us! ⁹You remember, brothers and sisters, our work and what we did to earn a living. We worked night and day so that we could bring you the Good News of God without being a burden to any of you.

¹⁰You and God are witnesses of how pure, honest, and blameless we were in our dealings with you believers. ¹¹You know very well that we treated each of you the way a father treats his children. We comforted you and encouraged you. Yet, we insisted that ¹²you should live in a way that proves you belong to the God who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

¹³Here is another reason why we never stop thanking God: When you received God's word from us, you realized it wasn't the word of humans. Instead, you accepted it for what it really is—the word of God. This word is at work in you believers. [GW]