



Theme: Lighting the Way – Paul's First Letters
"The Most Important Things"

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber on...
October 9-10, 2021

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24

Weekly Memory Verse:

¹⁶ Always be joyful. ¹⁷ Never stop praying. ¹⁸ Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. –1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

VIDEO Sermon Bumper

SLIDE *The Most Important Things*

My birthday was October 1 and my mother put together for me this collection of pictures shaped in a heart from when I was a very young boy. The title is, "Young Jeff," and I told her I was worried that another one was coming which was going to be titled, "Old Jeff." The pictures are pretty small, but you get the idea.

GRAPHIC Young Jeff

She really wanted to be sure and include a picture of me with my

great-grandmother, Grace Berry, but had a hard time finding those photos and so she sent them to me separately once she found them. Grandma Berry is the one who was my nanny when I was years old, and she was 85.

GRAPHIC Jeff, Shari and Grandma Berry

My parents were divorced, and my mom was going back to graduate school and teaching, and grandma Berry took care of me and my sister who was just an infant. Grandma Berry was in her 80's at the time. 80 years old and she was going to take care for a six-year-old boy and an infant girl, all day, five days a week. I hope I have that much energy when I'm 80!

Grandma Berry appeared on our doorstep with only 3 item that I can recall. A suitcase, a sewing kit, and a huge package of napkins which I described for you last week. The napkins were not just any napkins, they were special. Each napkin has imprinted on it the same reading from Psalms 118:24.

BIBLE

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Grandma Berry made me read that scripture before each meal as our grace. She wouldn't let me touch my food or even pick up my fork until I had said my prayer. To this day, that Psalm rumbles through my head before each meal. Somehow, some way, I think she knew that would happen!

Along with turning six, getting a baby sister, my parents being divorced, and Grandma Berry coming to live with us, there was one other major issue for me in 1969. I had really bad feet. They were pigeon-toed and flat as a board. When I was an infant, at night I had to sleep with my feet in boots that were mounted on a board, like duck feet, in order to correct my pigeon toes. The hardest part was not being able to sleep on

my side, and when I went to roll from back to front, I would flop on my face.

Sleeping on the board, however, wasn't half as bad as the shoes I had to wear during the day. They were these ugly brown things that seemed to lace up to my knees. The brown torture devices, as I had affectionately named them, also had special arch support that felt like rocks under my feet. I hated those shoes with a passion. I couldn't play in most games at school because I couldn't run in them very well. Not only were they uncomfortable, but they were embarrassing. They looked really dorky, and I was constantly picked on at school because of them. Tennis shoes were just coming into style and so everyone wore sneakers. Except me, I had to wear ugly brown shoes.

After the first month of school, I decided I wasn't going to take it anymore. I had these really cool new red sneakers which I only got to wear on special occasions, and I had a plan. Each morning, I would drop my cool red sneakers out of my window into the bushes. When I left the house for the bus stop, I would circle around the house, switch shoes, and stash my ugly brown shoes in the bushes. Then, when I returned home from school, I would change shoes again and throw my cool red sneakers through my window into my bedroom. This worked great for several weeks. Until one day, I came home from school, went to the bushes where I had stashed my ugly brown shoes, and they were...gone!

Fear swept through my whole body. I checked every bush around the house, but they were nowhere to be found. After what seemed like an endless search, I gathered my courage and went into the house. My only hope was to try and sneak into my room without being noticed. I went in the front door, then through the living room. The kitchen was all that stood in my way. Then I heard something. Clank, clank! Oh no! Grandma Berry washing dishes in the kitchen. So, I stepped as softly as I could, on my tippy toes. Suddenly, panic swept throughout my body as I saw them,

my ugly brown shoes, resting on the kitchen table. Grandma was at the sink with her back to me, so I casually grabbed the shoes as I walked by and just as I thought I had pulled it off I heard these words, “Jeffrey, how was your day today?” I knew I was in trouble as soon as she said JeffREY. They only use your whole name when you're in trouble.

The silence that followed her question seemed to last forever. “We need to have a little chat!” she said. We sat down and I got the “honesty is the best policy” speech. So, I honestly told her what a pain the ugly brown shoes were and how everyone made fun of me and picked on me and nobody at school liked me when I wore my ugly brown shoes. No one cared about me anyway, so what difference did correcting my feet make. She was 80, what did she know about being six!?

Then grandma looked at me with big eyes filled with tears and said, “Jeff, whether you are wearing fashionable red sneakers or ugly brown shoes I'll always love you and so will God!” She told me about her husband, grandpa Berry, who had died of a heart attack early in life. She told me that sometimes she got angry that he was gone. She talked about growing up in the depression and not knowing where she would get food to put on the table. She said she got lonely sometimes and she missed him, just like I probably missed mom and dad being together (although I was quick to point out I didn't miss dad's spankings!)

We talked for a long time that day about being sad, about missing people we care about. We talked about what school was like for me and how difficult it was, not only with the ugly brown shoes, but with lots of things. And she helped me talk with mom and work it out so I wouldn't have to wear the ugly brown shoes to school every day.

I will always be grateful to grandma and her wisdom that day. She could have scolded me or preached to me. But instead, she listened, and she cared. She shared her own hurt and fear with a little boy who needed

to know it was okay to be sad, and scared, and angry. It's a powerful healing experience to have someone not only hear where you are hurting, but also share with you their own hurts. You know you're not alone.

I think this was Paul's intent as he wrote letters to the early followers of Jesus in churches he had started. Today we bring to a conclusion a series of sermons that we been doing on one of the first Christian documents that we have in our Bible, 1 Thessalonians, which is a letter from Paul the apostle to one of the early churches he started in the Greco-Roman world. The letter was probably written around 50 A.D. which is just 20 years after the death and resurrection of Christ. It was written 20 years before any of the Gospels and when you get to the end of any of the letters of Paul you will find very practical and pithy wisdom, parting advice given to the church.

We're going to find several key principles for how we live our lives, and when we live this way, we will find life. We will find life more meaning-full, more success-full, more peace-full and more joy-full, if we practice these things. We want to begin by working our way backwards in the text we have for today from 1 Thessalonians 5. Would you read these words with me?

BIBLE

²¹ but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good. ²² Stay away from every kind of evil.

This is very good and practical advice. We are to examine and test everything that is said, hold on to what is good, and stay away from every kind of evil. If we look back to more verses, we will find out what Paul is referring to as he gives this advice. Verses 19 and 20 can help us understand what he is really trying to say.

BIBLE

¹⁹ **Do not stifle the Holy Spirit.** ²⁰ **Do not scoff at prophecies,**

In the early church, people would have a word they felt was given to them by the Holy Spirit and they would share that. There were no people with advanced or Bible degrees in the early church, so they would take turns sharing with the Holy Spirit has laid upon their hearts. Paul is telling them to be open to the Holy Spirit and not be overly critical of things people feel God has spoken to them, but also to test everything which is said. Even among the fellow followers of Jesus, they are to examine what is being said, hold on to what is good, and stay away from every kind of evil.

The implication is that it is possible for people who are well-meaning, with good hearts, who care about God and love Jesus and are trying to follow him, to give bad advice, or misunderstand what God is longing to say through them. That was true in the first century and it is still true today. Just because someone is a pastor, like me, that doesn't mean we are always right. I always tell you to not check your brain at the door of the church because I want each of us to engage our minds and test and examine what I say. Every week, I spend hours praying, discerning, reading commentaries, listening to podcasts, digging into the Scriptures, and trying to understand what they meant in their original context and how we might understand them today. I'm the first to admit that does not mean I always get it right. I try, and I work hard at it, but it doesn't mean I'm perfect by any means.

When we hear preachers or religious leaders online, even if it is someone well known that you respect, we should recognize that we are to test and examine those words because none of us is perfect. We are to bring a critical mind and asked the right questions with information that we receive and take into our brain, even within the context of the church. It is okay to set things aside so that we might challenge them and look at them more critically. Then we need to discern how we decide what is

nonnegotiable truth and what is something we might need to let go. We are going to talk in a bit about how we make that discernment.

Paul is asking us to practice discernment and do some homework, not just in our spiritual lives but in the world around us. When we are listening to the news, or reading something on social media, or listening to a podcast, we should be listening for truth and trying to understand what it is we are hearing and what is accurate and what is false. No one is correct all the time, not even my grandma Berry, God rest her soul. It's okay to take seriously what someone has shared and also ask questions so we can decide for ourselves how it is we are going to respond and what we will take in and what we will leave out. Remember that when Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, he gave us these words.

BIBLE

⁷ Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

None of us is perfect and I would add that if we think we are perfect and we never make mistakes, then we really have a problem. Paul would write in other letters to not be conceded and think of ourselves as better than others, but to recognize that we are all part of a body and each of us has a unique role and none of us has it all or has it all put together. Paul calls us to be critical thinkers because he knows how easy it is for us to be led astray when we don't test and examine things.

This week I read an entire report from the MIT Technology Review that was very disturbing. They found that, **“False information is 75% more likely to be retweeted and passed on than information which is factual.”** Misinformation is much more likely to be sent around by all of us than the truth. In their research they found out there were two major reasons.

SLIDE Novelty

The first issue they found was novelty. Nothing gets our attention more than something that seems outrageous or surprising, and the truth is that things are often outrageous and surprising because they are not true! The other issue they found was that people who often pass on this information are distracted or lazy.

SLIDE Distracted or Lazy

We often don't take the time to find out if something is accurate or true and we simply send it on because we are flabbergasted, and we think everyone should know. When we like something or give it a thumbs up or retweeted it then everyone who follows us gets to read the same misinformation, and they in turn pass that on and pretty soon we have what I like to call **"supersonic gossip."** Which, by the way, leads to **"supersonic sin."** Go ahead and say that seven times fast!

Here is the most disturbing part of this report, and why we must learn to test things. The researchers at MIT found that 19 of the top 20 Christian Facebook pages that are visited by people are fake and run by what are called "troll farms." The only legitimate page of the top 20 most popular Christian Facebook pages was guideposts.

"This is not normal," said the Facebook report, which was authored by Jeff Allen, a former data scientist for the powerful and profitable social media company. "This is not healthy. We have empowered inauthentic actors to accumulate huge followings for largely unknown purposes."

"These pages were part of a larger network that collectively reached nearly half of all Americans," wrote Karen Hao, senior AI editor for the [MIT Technology Review](#). "Troll farms reached 140 million Americans a month on Facebook before (the) 2020 election."

At times, up to 40% of U.S. page views went to fake sites that stole content from legitimate sites and repacked it into irresistible nuggets of

click bait and engagement bait. As Allen observed: “Our platform has given the largest voice in the Christian American community to a handful of bad actors, who, based on their media production practices, have never been to church.”

Facebook deserves plenty of blame for the popularity of its fake pages, but so do gullible users who fail to perform what Allen called “Basic Media Literacy Checks.” When Facebook’s relentless algorithms recommend pages, Allen recommends stopping and asking these basic questions:

SLIDE *(Have fly in please)*

- ***Who created this content?***
- ***How did they create this content?***
- ***What did they do to amplify this content?***
- ***Why did they create this content?***

“A lot of Christians are not using discernment when engaging on social media,” said Chris Martin, a content marketing editor for Moody Publishing who previously led social media strategy for Lifeway Christian Resources.

“Christ cared about the truth,” he said. ***“It reflects poorly on Christians and Christian thinking when we believe this crap. It’s depressing.”***

“You may be innocently visiting a Facebook page to read Bible verses, or inspirational quotes,” said Martin. *“You have these Eastern European groups that are amassing millions of Facebook followers.*

“Then something happens—there is a major election, or a pandemic—and the page will offer content that’s either misinformation or disinformation, content that’s intended to be divisive and generate

conflict.”

Martin says that instead of practicing discernment, too many Christians engage social media content therapeutically, and that doesn't bode well for discipleship or democracy.

*“They use content to make themselves feel good, like narcotics, and they don't care where it comes from as long as it makes them feel good. But the payoff is that we are supporting groups engaged in cultural hacking, groups that are **injecting more conflict and discord into American culture.**”*

From Steve Rabey, October 4, 2021 <https://ministrywatch.com/fake-facebook-pages-lure-millions-of-careless-christians/>

I get emails, Facebook requests, telephone calls, and many other fake and false items every week, which is why discernment is so important in today's world. It is why we are meant to test things and examine them through our lens of faith. We hear this phrase often, “Fake News,” and I found it fascinating that both Fox and CNN just this past week had to issue several retractions for news that was reported in accurately. This happens on a regular basis with almost every news outlet. Just because it is set on television or put out there in the blog post or on a video file does not mean it's true. Just because something is posted on someone's newsfeed, even though we trust that person, doesn't mean it's true which is why we must test everything and do our homework.

When we don't test and examine, whether it is from a religious or political figure, and just take something for granted without ever doing any homework ourselves, and we start acting upon it and actively sending out the misinformation, sometimes it can have catastrophic consequences. Democracy depends on people using their brain and examining everything, then holding onto what is good and setting aside what is evil or false.

We find in 1 Thessalonians Paul is asking them to test everything, even that comes from fellow believers who are good people trying their best to follow Jesus. Paul calls them to test if what they are hearing is really from God, especially if they are claiming to speak for God. This points to the fact that both religious talk and even Scripture can be misused. We interpret Scripture based on our own personal filter and history and we have seen places where Scripture has been misused throughout our human history. If we take just the right verse out of context, we can do things like subjugate and abuse women, and slave an entire race, and then quote Scripture to back us up. Scripture has been used to burn people alive during the Spanish Inquisition and kill millions who were the wrong faith tradition. Hitler and Christian leaders in the 1930s used Scripture to vilify the Jewish people which eventually led to the Holocaust. I've been to the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem where you can see some of the hateful flyers and communications, all laced with Scripture.

We are also called to read Scripture and try and understand the historical context in which Scripture emerged so we can understand how it fits in today's world. Much of what we read in the Bible we can apply directly today, but sometimes we have to ask questions to go deeper. Nancy Ambrose was the grandmother of the great American philosopher, preacher, civil rights leader, and spiritual writer Howard Thurman. He quoted his grandmother who was a slave herself when he shared these words.

“During the days of slavery, the master’s minister would occasionally hold church services for the slaves. Old man McGee was so mean that he would not let a negro minister preached to his slaves. Always the white minister used as his text something from Paul. At least three or four times a year he would read us, ‘Slaves be obedient to them that are your masters as under Christ.’ Then he would go on to show

using other texts how it was God's will that we were slaves, and how if we were good and happy slaves, God will bless us. I promised my Maker that if I ever learned to read, and if ever freedom came for me, I would not read that part of the Bible again."

She had listened to all the Scriptures and was practicing discernment as she recognized that the text being used could not reflect the will of God. As a slave, this could not be who God was for her. She needed to read it a different way and ask deeper questions to test and examine it against all the Scriptures, and light of everything else we find which tells us about God who created us free and not as slaves.

We have studied just one of Paul's letters which is brief and yet contains so much which is challenging. It encourages us to live our lives for Christ, and lives that are pleasing to God. Even within the text we have read for this series of sermons, we have been asking about the cultural context so we can better understand how God might be speaking to us to these words from Paul. How might the Holy Spirit be at work so we might hear the timeless will of God which lines up with the life, ministry, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus? Doing that enables us to hold on tight to what is good and let go of what is evil.

When we decide to follow Jesus and make him our Lord and Savior, we then choose to use his life, teachings, death, and resurrection the filter through which we determine what is good and what is evil. Jesus told us to love God and love others and share the good news and these become our basic principles. Simple questions can help us hold steady to what is good. Questions like, **"Will this please God? Is this the loving thing to do? Will this help build up God's kingdom and God's people, or will it tear it down? Is this what I would want someone to do for me?"**

We are to examine everything carefully and then hold onto what is good, which means that even if the preacher says it or we read it in

Scripture because we have pulled out one small section, it doesn't mean we have it right. We are challenged by Paul and by this teaching and by Jesus to ask tough questions before we simply respond or react, so that we can avoid every kind of evil, especially evil done in the name of the Lord.

Going to back up a few more verses in this text today to discover a few more pieces of wisdom from the apostle. These are your memory verses for this week so let's say them together out loud. They are ones you may have heard before because they just make sense. These are keys to experiencing God's goodness in life as well as overcoming challenges and hardship.

BIBLE

¹⁶ Always be joyful. ¹⁷ Never stop praying. ¹⁸ Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

These words can help us have life, which is more meaningful, relationships which are deeper, and almost every part of life can be impacted by these words.

SLIDE Always be joyful.

Being joyful is not always an emotion, although it can be. Being joyful is about how we see the world and ties in very close to giving thanks in all circumstances which we find in verse 18.

SLIDE *Charis* = Grace, "good will, loving-kindness, favor"

The Greek is this idea of grace, which is good will, lovingkindness, and undeserved favor. When we show grace to someone, we show kindness even though they had no right to expect it, or they were undeserving. God's grace is everything we have received which we didn't earn and don't necessarily deserve. This idea of always being joyful ties

directly into grace because it's about looking around and realizing that everything in life is a gift. When we wake up and are basic orientation in life is that we deserve everything we have an even more, we typically will live a very unhappy life.

But, when we wake up in the morning and recognize that each day is a gift, it changes how we look at life and how we experience the world and the people around us. When we don't take for granted the air that we breathe or the colors around us in the fall or the food we eat or the water we drink, it changes our entire dispensation. Did we cause it to rain or create the air or make the seasons? No, because the basic building blocks of life and so much more are all gifts. We didn't do anything to deserve them or earn them. The love I have for my wife or my children and the love they give me are all gift, even when they drive me crazy. The opportunity to be lead pastor at Summit Church and so many other things in my life are gifts. I either wake up every day and look around and wish my life was better and think I deserve more, OR I recognize the gifts which I have received and recognize I don't deserve any of it.

I'm so thankful for my grandma Berry who gave me Psalm 118:24 to pray before each meal which captures this idea. I wake up every morning to the sound of this Scripture in my head and it changes me and my perspective.

BIBLE

²⁴ **This is the day the Lord has made.
We will rejoice and be glad in it.**

That leads us to being joyful and to a life which is more fulfilling and happier.

SLIDE Never Stop Praying

Having that orientation in life, that everything is a gift, also leads us

to never stop praying. This idea is not about walking around all day with your eyes closed in a constant prayer but recognizing that God is always with us and in all places. God spirit lives inside of us and we recognize the truth of Psalm 139.

BIBLE

- ¹ O Lord, you have examined my heart
and know everything about me.**
- ² You know when I sit down or stand up.
You know my thoughts even when I'm far away.**
- ³ You see me when I travel
and when I rest at home.
You know everything I do.**
- ⁴ You know what I am going to say
even before I say it, Lord.**
- ⁵ You go before me and follow me.
You place your hand of blessing on my head.**
- ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too great for me to understand!**
- ⁷ I can never escape from your Spirit!
I can never get away from your presence!**

God's spirit permeates us, even if we don't realize it. If I know that God is with me all the time, and I choose to believe that and trust that, it means that I in constant communion with God. Pausing at any moment in life and recognizing this truth can be prayer. I had a spiritual director when I was younger who talked about the importance of "street prayer" for those of us who have a hard time settling down. I'm pretty sure I have had ADHD since I was a kid, but it was never diagnosed because my prayer life is often, "Dear God... Oh look, a bird!" One thing you can begin to do that can be really helpful is to add several 1 minute pauses to your day.

SLIDE**1 Minute Pause**

I put them in my calendar and my phone goes off to remind me to pause at different moments throughout the day. This is an easy way to always be joyful and never stop praying and do the third thing Paul talks about in this section of Scripture which is to be thankful. I have taught you before that the fundamental act of worship, the response of the creature to the creator, is just two words.

SLIDE**Thank You**

This is the only response to the God who gives us life and breath in this world in which we live. If we understand that everything is pure gift then our only response is to give thanks. Paul encourages us to give thanks and to be thankful in all circumstances because this is God's will for us who belong to Jesus Christ. I reminded us before that this truth has been researched and found to be true in the secular world. Psychology has discovered that people who give thanks regularly are happier, healthier, have better mental health, better physical health, lower blood pressure, have less anger, live longer and more fulfilled lives. Giving thanks on a regular basis is a fundamental key to life.

Living a life of gratitude changes us. I was visiting recently with a family who lost a loved one tragically and traumatically. As I entered their home, I heard laughter, which kind of surprised me. But soon it was clear that they were laughing because, even though there was deep sorrow and pain and hurt, they were remembering their loved one was a gift and the life they shared, every moment, was something they should now cherish. You see, being joyful and praying continuously and being thankful always, changes even how we do grief.

I have often shared with families who have lost a child our experience and reminded them that our children are gifts to us, and they belong to God before they belong to us. I recognize that while we had our

son for 10 years, God will hold him forever and for that I thankful always and even in the most tragic circumstances. I want to be clear that I don't believe God causes the pain and hurt in our lives or that we should be thankful FOR loss or trauma. We can, however, choose in those moments to find things for which we are thankful, such as the fact that the pain we feel when we lose someone is because they were a gift, and we miss that gift that blessed us. It would be much worse if we couldn't give thanks because they didn't mean anything to us, and we felt nothing.

When we understand that life is a gift, and that God is present with us always, being thankful in all circumstances comes naturally. In life, we can focus on our disappointments and all the things we wish we had but don't. We can wish for different spouse or a different job or a different house or a different bank account. We can focus on what we don't have and what we've lost, or we can count our blessings and recognize that this is the day the Lord has made. I think of a truth I heard many years ago that is a powerful metaphor, especially those of us who have enjoyed camping in life. "We have a choice of tents we can live in in our lives."

GRAPHIC Two Tents - Which Tent Do You Live In?

conTENTment or disconTENTment (have fly in under the writing on the graphic)

We decided in which tent we will live, and one of them is miserable. The other one leads to a meaningful and joyful life. If we are in a workplace or a marriage or any relationship and all that happens is people point out what is wrong, and they never say, "thank you," he will be a miserable employee or spouse. Companies and relationships can't survive if there is nothing but discontentment. As followers of Jesus, we are called to give thanks to God and to one another. Once again, let's say these words together.

BIBLE

¹⁶ Always be joyful. ¹⁷ Never stop praying. ¹⁸ Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

If we want to know God's will for us, Paul makes it very clear in this text. We recognize that all of life is a gift, and we pray continually, and we give thanks in all circumstances. We are going to go back a few more verses to wrap things up today, and for these few verses I want to look at Eugene Peterson's translation of this text from The Message version of the Bible.

BIBLE

¹⁴ ... Gently encourage the stragglers, and reach out for the exhausted, pulling them to their feet. Be patient with each person, attentive to individual needs. And be careful that when you get on each other's nerves you don't snap at each other. Look for the best in each other, and always do your best to bring it out.

This is a great description of what it means I think to love others in a very practical way. If we are willing to gently encourage stragglers and reach out to the exhausted and be patient and attentive to others needs, being careful not to snap at each other and look out for the best in each other and always do our best to bring out the best in others, we will find life and fulfillment. We discover that our life is a mission every single day.

I know that I get this wrong every single day, but I think we are asked to see who God has put in our path around us that needs encouragement. How do we encourage others at the gas station and the grocery store and every other stop in our daily lives? Can we notice and give thanks to those who serve us in simple ways, recognizing that especially in this time of pandemic over the last 18 months many of them have felt overworked and underappreciated? Our day might get interrupted when we stopped to ask if someone is okay because they had that look in their eyes, but it

also might be the most important thing we do that day. The midst of listing, we have a chance to lift someone up and encourage them, helping them to know they are really loved.

God's strategy for answering prayers and helping people in life is using you and me and mission. Many go through life discouraged and what they really need is someone to come alongside of them. One of the things I love about this congregation is your willingness to do that through our Stephen Ministry and other caring ministries. Sometimes, we are the weak and exhausted and need others to come alongside of us, and other times we are meant to return that ministry and mission as we care for others. This is meant to be the rhythm of our lives. Created for the mission of being the presence of Jesus Christ to other people.

GRAPHIC Grandma Berry

That brings you back to my grandma Berry. She lived to be 104 years old, and this is a picture of her on her 100th birthday. I remember visiting with her at her nursing home several times after she had turned 100. She would have wheel her around the nursing home so we could read letters and share Bible passages with the "old people." One particular person we visited with was just plain mean and grumpy and I asked grandma why she kept visiting that person who would yell at her for reading the Bible or saying a prayer. I'll never forget her response. She said, "If there is anyone who needs to be reminded that God loves them, it's him!"

While I saw someone who was grumpy or mean, she saw someone who was a straggler, exhausted, and in need of attention. She didn't let him get on her nerves or snap at him but looked for the best. One of the last times we visited with him he was not very responsive, and when we got to the prayer at the end and we said the Lord's Prayer, I noticed his lips moving and as I look back is a powerful picture for me of how big God's grace is and how much we are invited to be joyful, to never stop

praying, to give thanks always, to discern what is right and good, and to do our best to encourage and be the answer to someone's prayers. I pray you will discover that wisdom so it might change your life and bring fulfillment and meaning and purpose and joy. Let's pray.

SLIDE Prayer

Jesus, how grateful we are to you for the gift of life. We recognize that the air we breathe, the world we live in, and everything we experience is gift. Thank you, God. We pray that you would help us to remember your presence and that you walk with us all the time, through both the joy and sorrow we experience. Help us to give thanks in all circumstances.

Thank you, God, for the gift of our minds and being able to think. Help us to think critically and examine and test what we hear so we might hold on to what is true and good and to dismiss what is harmful and evil. Give us strength to encourage the stragglers, reach out to the exhausted, be patient with each other, and always do our best to bring out the best in others. As we do these things, help us to live as people of the light, lighting the way so others might experience your glory through us in our lives. In your holy name...Amen

October 9-10 Order

1. Ely Welcomes people and says, **“Today we are going to talk about the most important things in life that can help us discover meaning, purpose and hope.”**
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)
 - Glow with God Family Event
5. Invite congregation to prepare their hearts for the message.
6. Video bumper plays.
7. Sermon
8. Prayer after sermon
9. Offering SLIDE and Focus
10. 2 Songs of Worship
11. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
12. Meditation Moments reminder by Jeff
13. Care Ministers (If any are present)
14. Closing Prayer