

God's Will For Your Life

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[0 : 00] All right. King's Kids, you can go ahead and head out to your King's Kids class. God bless you.! And the rest of us, we've been making our way through 1 Thessalonians. That's where we're going to be again this morning.

We were just in chapter 3 last week. We're going to be in chapter 4, verses 1 through 8 this week. If you are using a pew Bible, that's going to be on page 1173. Now, in the passage this morning, Paul is going to make a shift in how he's addressing these young but incredibly faithful believers. Paul has just shared Timothy's good report that their faith has been strong in the midst of persecution, which is exciting and encouraging for Paul to hear. And now he's going to turn his attention to some ways that he wants the Thessalonians to grow in their faith and in their character. So this morning, we'll be in 1 Thessalonians 4, 1 through 8. And here's where we're going as we look at the passage, just so that we're all on the same page, so to speak. The first move of the passage this morning is going to be our new aim, okay? Our new aim. Next, Paul is going to give us three pictures of holiness, three pictures of holiness. And then lastly, we're going to be looking at three motivations for holiness. So let's hear what Paul has to say to the Thessalonians and to us as well. Picking up in verse 1. Finally then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God, that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things. As we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you, for God has not called us for impurity but in holiness. Therefore, whoever disregards this disregards not man but God who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

[2 : 55] And may God bless the reading of his word this morning. All right, so the first move of this passage is our new aim. As we read that, I'm guessing that what stands out to you as we hear those words is the serious tone that Paul takes in this passage, especially when we contrast it to what we heard last week in chapter 3, where there's a lot of celebration that was just going on over the fact that the Thessalonians were standing strong, right?

But now things take a shift in Paul's tone. And that's because he wants the Thessalonians to take seriously this call to guard against a sin that is a very real threat to their faith.

The Thessalonians, by God's grace, they've been faithful. They've been strong in the midst of persecution, which is absolutely worth celebrating. But persecution is not the only danger on the horizon. So there's a seriousness that's happening here. There's sobriety to Paul's words.

But even so, there's still warmth there, right? Notice how Paul begins the passage in verse 1.

Finally then, brothers or brothers and sisters, finally then, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus. Even though he's about to talk about the serious call of holiness on the lives of the Thessalonians, Paul, he doesn't just come out swinging, right? He doesn't come out making demands. He approaches this with an appeal, which is consistent with how he treated them when he was with them, how he's spoken to them actually throughout this entire letter. If you remember back in chapter 1, verses 11 through 12, Paul says, This is what good dads do, right? Is that even though they wield authority, they seek to win their kids to the goodness of obedience, to the goodness of listening and following and doing what dad says.

So good dads teach their kids to obey and they win them to obedience. Why? Because they love their kids. And Paul loves the church at Thessalonica.

[5 : 45] So everything that he says in this letter, in this passage, he calls them to because he loves them. Okay? That's the heart behind this appeal.

So what is he appealing for? Verse 1 again. That as you received from us how to walk and to please God just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. However, Paul is calling them to walk in a way that pleases God, to conduct their lives in a way that pleases God.

And encouragingly, he says that they're actually already doing this, but he wants them to press into it more and more, that you do so more and more.

Now, just as we thought just for a minute on Paul's heart for the Thessalonians, let's pause for a moment and let's ask ourselves, what kind of God is this that Paul says that they should please?

[6 : 52] Because God is, he's all over this passage, right? Unsurprisingly. Paul calls the Thessalonians to please God. He says that their sanctification is the will of God.

He says that the Gentiles who give themselves over to lust reveal that they do not know God. He says that the Lord God is an avenger. He says God has called the Thessalonians to holiness, and those who disregard those words disregard God.

So, who is this God who Paul is calling us to orient our lives around pleasing? And I know this sounds like a very basic question like Christianity 101, but seriously, what kind of person is this God?

If you look back on chapter 1, verse 4, I think it's on the same pages in your pew Bible. Paul writes this, 1 verse 4. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he, that God has chosen you.

That this is a God who has set his love on you. A God who has chosen you in the midst of your sins to rescue you, and he did not do that begrudgingly.

[8 : 16] He does not love you with annoyance and irritation. He's not a God who just kind of holds his nose around you.

If you are in Christ right now, you are loved with a, and here I quote from the theology tome that is the Jesus Storybook Bible, that that is God's heart for you.

If you are in Christ. So, do not lose sight of that God as we hear about our responsibility to honor him in this passage.

Okay? That God, the God who is worthy of all of the honor and all the glory and all of the praise and who has somehow set his love on us, not because we deserve it, deserved it, but because he is gracious, that God is now the controlling center of our lives.

We belong to him, and now his desires are our commands. Our lives are about pleasing him, no longer about pleasing ourselves.

[9 : 31] This is our new aim as Christians, to please God. He is the one who sets the agenda.

We accept his authority, and we strive to do what honors and makes much of him in every area of our lives, resting in the fact that he knows what is best.

And there is no component of our lives that does not fall under this call to please God. And one of the things that pleases God is our sanctification.

So, if you look at verse 3, For this is the will of God. Okay, pause really quick. If you came in today wanting to know God's will for your life, get excited, because you are about to hear it.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification. So, congratulations. You now get to live the rest of your life knowing exactly what God's will is for you.

[10 : 42] It's for you to grow in holiness and in Christ-likeness. You are welcome. Now, that word, that word for sanctification, we can also translate that as holiness, by the way.

Sanctification, holiness. So, again, verse 3, For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God, that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter.

So, what Paul gives us here is he's giving us three pictures, if you will, of what holy sexuality looks like. Remember that our aim as Christians is to please God, and part of pleasing God is following his will for our bodies and how we use them.

What we do with our bodies sexually matters to God. So, this isn't something that's off limits. Okay, we don't get to just take this thing and separate it from our faith.

So, we're going to look at those three pictures, and then after that, we're going to look at three God-centered motivations for holy sexuality.

[12 : 06] So, three pictures of holiness, three motivations for holiness. That's where we're going to be headed for the rest of this sermon. All right, first picture of holiness.

This is at the end of verse three. That you abstain from sexual immorality. Now, when Paul uses that term, sexual immorality, you might be wondering what all he has in mind there.

The Greek word that is translated in your Bible as sexual immorality is the Greek word *porneus*, which comes from the root for *pornea*.

And if you're thinking, huh, that sounds an awful lot like one of our words in English. And you would be absolutely right to think that and make that connection. *Pornea*, in the Greek, it functioned as this kind of all-encompassing junk drawer term that referred to just all sexual activity that happens outside of marriage between a man and a woman.

Okay, so this is everything that goes against the established sexual ethic of the Scriptures. In Acts chapter 15, when the Jerusalem Council affirms the glorious reality that the gospel is not just for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles, one of the instructions that they give the Gentiles for how to live as believers in the Messiah is to abstain from sexual immorality, *porneus*.

[13:39] It's the same word. So what Paul is teaching, the Thessalonians here in this letter, is consistent with the teaching of the apostles in other places, and it's consistent with what we're taught throughout the rest of the Scriptures as well.

So just to be clear, sex outside of marriage, that is *pornea*, that is outside of God's good design.

Homosexuality, that would be *pornea*, that is something that is outside of God's good design.

Prostitution, which was something that was readily available in that culture at that time, that would be *pornea*, outside of God's good design.

Adultery, *pornea*, you get the point. And for the Christians in Thessalonica, the idea of holy sexuality, a sexuality that stays exclusively within the context of the marriage between a man and a woman, this would have been a difficult concept for the Greek believers to get on board with because the culture in Thessalonica was, shall we say, sexually loose.

Just about the only sexual act that that culture would have disagreed with was adultery, and it was because of how that messed with the family lineage.

[15:08] Okay, don't mess up my family line, right? Just about everything else outside of that was mostly considered fair game. So this idea of sexual holiness, this would have been a significant adjustment for many Greeks who God had rescued out of a pagan and a sexually loose culture, which should encourage us because our culture is also quite broken when it comes to sex and gender.

So there is a lot that we can relate to here with our brothers and sisters in Thessalonica, even though we're 2,000 years removed from them.

Now, before we go on, I want to draw attention to a few things that can fly under the radar that we need to acknowledge, that I think would be helpful for us to acknowledge.

If you're here this morning and you are a committed follower of Christ, these are some areas where I think that you're most likely to fall into the temptation of sexual immorality.

We're capable of falling into anything apart from God's grace, but I think that these are probably the strongest temptations for us. First off, men, men in the room, you and I know this, pornography has an incredible draw, and it's incredibly, incredibly accessible.

[16:52] If you have a smartphone, you are maybe three clicks away from seeing anything that your sinful mind can imagine or desire.

That's how accessible this abomination is. And let me also just say that this does not have to have the word *porn* attached to it in order for it to be sin, because you can get the same lustful high off of a music video or a scene in a movie, and just because it doesn't have the word *porn* to it does not mean that it is outside of God's design.

So here's the reality. If what you are seeing on a screen awakens in you a desire for any person other than your wife, it is *pornea*.

It's outside of God's command. And if you're single and you don't have a spouse, it's still *pornea*. Okay? It is something that is off limits.

Now, if that happens to be you this morning, and you are hiding, and you love your Lord, and you want to stop dishonoring Him through this sin, then you have got to bring it to the light.

[18:14] You've got to confess it. And honestly, you can come tell me. You can come and tell one of our elders. And I can promise you this, that we are not going to shame you.

Satan wants to shame men that are stuck in this sin. And that is not how God changes sinners. He changes them with forgiving and empowering grace, and that's what we want to help you latch onto.

Okay? That's where we're going to point you if you get this thing out in the light. We're going to point you to God's grace as the means of fighting this thing. Okay? And that same thing, that goes for any kind of sexual sin that any of us might be caught in right now.

I want everybody in the room to hear that. So if you are dating, and your significant other, and you are doing things that God has said not to, let's get that out in the open. Let us resist that with God's grace.

Confess it, and let's work against it. If you are experiencing homosexual desires, and you are afraid of other Christians knowing about that, let's get that out in the open, and let's work through that with God's grace.

[19 : 41] Talk to one of us pastors and elders. Talk to your life group leader. And then lastly on this point, I want to say to my dear sisters in the room that you need to be careful with the novels and the stories that you read.

I know that there's growing numbers of women who are struggling with visual pornography, so I just want to acknowledge that. But by and large, for women, the main issue, I think, is probably going to be in the stories that you choose to read.

And I'll just say the same thing that I said to the men, which is that if you read something that awakens a desire in you for a man who is not your husband, then that is pornea. That is something that is against the command of the Lord.

And again, I would say, get it out into the open. Bring a mature sister into that and fight it with God's grace. So flee, abstain, distance yourself from sexual immorality.

And by the way, extreme measures on this are not extreme. If our Lord Jesus said to tear out your eye and throw it from you in order to avoid lusting, it is not crazy to toss out your smartphone and get a dumb phone.

[21 : 02] That would not be crazy. What would be crazy would be not treating the sin like the spiritual disease that it is. That would be crazy.

Okay? So abstain from sexual immorality. The second picture of holiness. Control your body in holiness as one who knows the Lord.

Control your body in holiness as one who knows the Lord. Verse four. That each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.

Now that word know for know how to control, Paul isn't talking about just knowing information like you know the capital of Wisconsin or you know the freezing temperature of water.

That's not the kind of knowing that he's talking about. He is talking about knowing like it's a life skill. It's a learned competency which involves intentionality.

[22 : 19] Nobody stumbles and falls into sanctification. Okay? That doesn't happen. It comes from building a momentum of holiness and growing in knowing how to control yourself so you can use your body to glorify God and not for your sinful pleasure.

Which is the exact opposite of the culture that these Greek Christians came from. Paul says that the Thessalonians should not be like the Gentiles who do not what?

That they do, yes, that do not know God. Those who don't know God do not have an issue with handing themselves over to the passion of lust which makes sense because if you don't know God your primary aim in life whether you know it or not is to please yourself.

But if you know God, truly know Him like you know your closest friend then the natural result of that is going to be an increasing and growing holiness that aims at pleasing God.

This is the beauty of 2 Corinthians 3.18 And we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord seeing Him, knowing Him are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

[23 : 48] Getting transformed by seeing Jesus by knowing Jesus. Or in Ephesians where Paul says that the ministry of the church is to build up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4.12-13 So here's the point. Knowing God transforms you. Knowing God transforms the very structure of our hearts so that we come to love the things that God loves.

So we control our bodies as is right for those who know the living God. Final picture of holiness.

Sexual sin is never private. Sexual sin is never private. This is verse 6. That no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter.

Now I think that the most direct application of this verse is a prohibition against adultery. That is no doubt something that Paul has prominently in mind in this verse but note at the end that he says that no one wronged his brother in this matter and the matter that Paul is addressing right now is how every aspect of our sexuality needs to be submitted to the aim of pleasing the Lord.

[25 : 24] So adultery is not the only sin that's in view in this verse which means that this verse points us to the reality that our sexual sin regardless of who is or is not aware of it always does damage to the church.

that sexual sin is never private it always impacts more than just you. By God's good design you are part of a local body of believers and when you sin even if it's something as private as pornography you do not just wrong yourself you wrong your brothers and sisters in Christ.

we live in a culture that wants us to believe that what we do with our bodies as long as it is consensual that it's nobody's business except our own and that it doesn't affect anyone else but that's not true because sin always does collateral damage.

It always does collateral damage. Now as important as all this is to know these things that we just talked about in and of themselves knowing these things is not sufficient to cause us to change. It's crucial that we know what our target of sexual holiness is but defining sexual sin knowing that we should control our bodies and recognizing that sin is never private those three things aren't going to in and of themselves help us to get to the target knowing those things is not going to inspire permanent change within our hearts which is why Paul ends his plea for holiness by drawing the Thessalonians attention to the triune God because at the end of the day you and I are incapable in our own strength of living out the holiness that the Lord calls us to in this passage we are totally dependent on the forgiving and transforming power of the triune God in order to live this way so let's follow along with

[27 : 54] Paul and let's hear the three God centered motivations for pursuing sexual holiness motivation number one God is an avenger God is an avenger verse six that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter because the Lord is an avenger in all these things as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you so Paul says that God is an avenger of sexual sin and that should motivate us to pursue holiness in other words God will bring justice on all sexual sin when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ which I'm guessing is not a typical motivation that we think about when we think about our sanctification this idea that God is an avenger and part of the reason that we don't think of that as a primary motivator is that throughout the

New Testament the emphasis in strengthening and empowering the pursuit of holiness is God's grace and love and mercy that's the thing that gets the emphasis in scripture and gloriously so but there's still a category in the New Testament for letting judgment day fuel our holiness in the here and now that's a category of thinking and that's the category that Paul is pointing us to here in 1 Thessalonians 4 6 here's another passage in that same category to show you some other places that this shows up 2 Corinthians 5 10 for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body whether good or evil so every single person Christian or not is going to stand before the judgment seat of

Christ one day everyone shows up in the courtroom of heaven and when we do our sexual sin is something that's going to be on the table that's according to 1 Thessalonians 4 6 another verse in this category of thinking James 3 1 James says not many of you should become teachers my brothers for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness that verse is in the scriptures to motivate teachers in God's word to teach faithfully and to prevent people from flippantly pursuing becoming Bible teachers and in a similar way in this verse Paul is soberly and seriously motivating us towards sexual holiness because God himself will one day judge all sexual sin!

dens which means that based on Christ's faithfulness we do not look at judgment day with the fear of hell that is not how Christians look at judgment day because we know that the joy of heaven is on the other side of that day but we still strive so that on that day we get to hear those words of well done, good and faithful servant.

Enter into the joy of your master. So by God's grace, that's the thing that we're striving for. We're striving for that kind of faithfulness. So that's the first motivation in this passage.

[32 : 33] God is an avenger. Motivation number two, God has called us in holiness. God has called us in holiness.

Verse seven, for God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. So that's that glorious reminder. God has called us. He has chosen us, but he has not just chosen us for salvation.

The story of the Christian life is not believe in Jesus and be saved from your sins and then wait around until you die and go to heaven. Okay, that's not the story of the Christian life.

When God saves you, he saves you onto a path of relationship with the triune God that goes from now until all of eternity.

And the path that you're on right now is a path in which you are called to grow in your personal holiness before the Lord. No one earns their way to heaven, but we are on a path of growing and increasing holiness that honors God.

[33 : 42] This is 1 Peter 1.16. For you shall be holy, for I am holy. Right? This is Ephesians 1.4.

God chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him.

One of the commentators that I read this week says that when God called us as Christians, he called us into the sphere where sanctification takes place.

That he calls us into a realm where God graciously starts to shape us more and more into his image and likeness, making our character his character in the context of a personal relationship with him.

So when God saved you, he called you into a lifelong pursuit of holiness and sanctification. He called you to strive towards maturity as you walk with him, rooted in his love and grace.

[34 : 55] And I can guarantee you, God's word guarantees you that this path of holiness is better than any sexual sin that God calls you to lay down.

So whatever it is, you can name whatever struggle, anything that you are facing, whatever that thing is that you don't want to give up, whatever desire that you want to hold on to, it is not going to be as satisfying or as fulfilling as walking in the holiness that God has called you to, this God who loved you and gave himself up for you.

That is going to be far more satisfying than anything that the world has to offer you. We've been called in holiness. Last motivation in this passage.

If you disregard this, you disregard God. Verse 8, therefore whoever disregards this disregards not man but God who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

Throughout this passage, even though he is appealing to the Thessalonians in love, Paul makes it quite clear that the holiness that he is describing, it comes from an authority that is other than himself.

[36 : 17] That these words are not guidelines or suggestions or opinions. And that's because the ultimate source of this sexual ethic is God himself.

In verse 1, Paul says, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus. So they are making their appeal not on the basis of their own authority. They're making it on the basis of the authority of Christ.

Then in verse 2, for you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. The instructions, the commands, the marching orders, if you will, of this passage are instructions that come ultimately from the Lord.

And I apologize, I lost my place. There we are. And then finally at the end of this passage, we're going to the last verse now, okay? Verse 8, we have the clearest claim of authority of all, which is what we just read.

Therefore, whoever disregards this disregards not man, but God who gives his Holy Spirit to you. So if you belong to the living God, Paul is not delivering a TED Talk, okay?

[37 : 35] Nor is this sermon meant to function as one. For Christians who ignore what the Bible teaches on sexuality, Paul says quite clearly that they are not disregarding men, but that they are disregarding God, the God who claimed us and has rescued us.

When we come to Christ, God's views on sex and gender and marriage, those things become our views. Because again, we're a people who care about pleasing God.

We are a people who care about God's will and not our own. And so that means that we lay everything down at his feet and we say, you are God and we are not.

Give us wisdom. So that's the posture of the Christian is sitting underneath the word of God. Before we close, there's one final thing that I want to point out in this passage.

It's the last thing that Paul says. And I think that this is hugely significant for this very serious topic that I hope will encourage you.

[38 : 52] Paul says, God who gives his Holy Spirit to you. God who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

So what's the significance of the fact that God gives his Holy Spirit to us? How does he, the Holy Spirit, how does he relate to this whole conversation surrounding our holiness?

The fact that God gives his Holy Spirit means that God does not leave us to pursue holiness in our own strength.

He does not abandon us to our sinful desires and expect us to live holy lives through sheer force of will.

He in his kindness has given us his Holy Spirit. So work harder and do better is not the Christian path to transformation.

[39 : 58] Okay, that is not it. The Christian path to transformation is striving in the grace and the strength of the Holy Spirit.

That's what Christian transformation looks like. In his high priestly prayer, praise God that this passage is in your Bible. John 14, 15 through 17.

Jesus said this, If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper to be with you forever.

Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him. Why? For he dwells with you and will be with you.

Which means that every believer in Christ in this room is indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Every single one of us.

[41 : 04] Just pause. Just be amazed at that for a moment. That the Spirit of the living God dwells in you to strengthen you and to help you in your fight for holiness.

Whatever that is. It could be sexual holiness. It could be any other way. Any other sin that you are trying to put to death. There is no step of the Christian life that you walk apart from his empowering strength upholding you.

Which means that there is always hope for holiness. Always. Always. If you have made a mess of your life through sexual sin, there is hope for holiness.

Don't sit in self-pity. Don't fall for the accusations of your enemy. Don't fall for the lie that this is a sin that you cannot gain victory in.

Because God is so unbelievably for you that he gave you his Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is in you to strengthen you in this fight.

[42 : 22] So do not give up. Now what I'm not saying is that all you have to do is believe more in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And then snap. Everything is going to be better. Okay? So that's not what I'm saying. I'm not saying that the fight for holiness should be easy. Because it's not. And it's especially not going to be easy if you have built up a momentum of sin in your life that you're trying to stop.

That is something that is going to take time. It's going to take hard and painful work in denying yourself and putting your sin to death.

But if you have the Holy Spirit at work in you, then you should abound in the hope that a new momentum of holiness is possible.

If it was just up to you, then sure. Change is just like a pipe dream. Like not going to happen. But if it's up to you living in the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit and striving in the strength that God provides, then you can kick despair and self-loathing to the curb.

[43 : 36] And you can say, you don't have a place here. You tell your downcast heart those words from Psalm 42. Why are you downcast, O my soul?

And why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God. For I shall again praise him.

My salvation and my God. We serve a God who has given his Holy Spirit to us.

And so as we strive for holiness, we have all the reason to boldly hope for change. Amen? Amen.

So let's acknowledge the fact that God is an avenger of sin. Let's remember that God's calling on our lives involves our holiness.

[44 : 36] And let's give all regard to the God who has graciously given us his Holy Spirit as we seek to live lives that are pleasing to him in accordance with his will.

Let's pray. Amen. Let's pray. From Psalm 119, 33 through 40. Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will keep it to the end.

Give me understanding that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.

Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from looking at worthless things and give me life in your ways.

Confirm to your servant your promise that you may be feared. Turn away the reproach that I dread, for your rules are good. Behold, I long for your precepts.

[45 : 39] In your righteousness, give me life. Heavenly Father, would you help us to trust that your way is best? Would you help us to live lives of integrity?

We want to walk faithfully, Lord God, but we cannot do that alone. Thank you for giving your Holy Spirit to us. Thank you for not leaving us to our own strength.

Thank you for being both our Savior and our strength, Father. Would you continue doing a work in our church so that we might grow in our faithfulness to you.

And it's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen. Amen.