

STRENGTHENING YOUR GRIP

Strengthening Your Grip on Priorities

1 Thessalonians 2:1–13



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The church pulpit is much more than a polished podium from which a pastor can pontificate. Since the beginning of our Christian heritage, the pulpit has been the primary place from where God's Word has been dispensed to His people. From the pulpit, pastors proclaim God's truth, sound His warnings, and feed His people.

But what governs the words of spiritual nourishment that come from the pulpit? *Priorities*. It's easy to see a church's priorities when the ministry is just starting out, when the ink of the congregation's ideals is still wet on the paper. But later on, when storms roll in, the priority list can get blown away in a gust of confusion.

To keep this list securely nailed down, we must strengthen our grip on four priorities that must characterize our churches as well as our personal lives.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Four Priorities That Characterize a Meaningful Ministry (1 Thessalonians 2:1–13)

With time, churches can lose their vitality. Instead of allowing God to stretch and shape them into living communities of believers, many congregations petrify in traditionalism. Maintaining programs becomes more important than ministering to people. And the result is an ingrown, stagnant clique. Writing to the church at Thessalonica, Paul gave four priorities that will keep our ministries spiritually vital and meaningful.

- **Biblical:** Meaningful ministry must stay on target by maintaining a faithful commitment to the Word of God.
- **Authentic:** Meaningful ministry must have integrity and credibility and strive to stimulate Christians to growth in Christ. No flattery, no greed, no ego trip, no exploitation.
- **Gentle:** Meaningful ministry must operate with grace and tenderness, like a nursing mother with her child.
- **Relevant:** Meaningful ministry must teach that the Bible is alive with relevance. The amazing thing about the Bible is that it is *never* out-of-date.



Quotable

“You can come to church, sit, leave, and NEVER be impacted by another life. That’s tragic, you know?”

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. The Result of a Meaningful Ministry

Biblical accuracy. Authenticity. Gentleness. Relevance. When these priorities guide church ministry and our personal lives, Christianity is not something we put on and take off, like a coat from the closet. It is something we assimilate, something that soaks into our lives so deeply and completely that it changes the very chemistry of our being. And only when we strengthen our grip on changing from the inside out will we significantly impact the world around us.



A CLOSER LOOK

The Real Meaning of “Relevant”

Relevance is good. But when does relevance become compromise? We can conform to our culture so much that we distort God’s Word in the process. In the interest of making biblical truth more palatable, more in line with the congregation’s “felt needs,” churches often end up pleasing people instead of God. Perhaps you’ve seen this happen. Maybe you’ve even heard some of these comments from other Christians or even in your own church:

- “People don’t want to hear about sin these days; it’s too negative. We need to uplift people and make them feel good about themselves.”
- “With all the violence in today’s world, the last thing we should talk about is Jesus, the victim of brutal injustice, hanging on a bloody cross.”
- “A virgin birth? Get real! What difference does Jesus’s mother or the nature of His birth make to our lives today?”

Christians today must face the challenge to stay up with the times without looking down on the Word. We must understand our culture, not to reinterpret the gospel of Christ and change its meaning but to explain it in terms our culture will understand. Human sinfulness, God’s love and forgiveness, and Jesus’s miraculous birth apply just as much to the teenager who surfs the Internet as to the turn-of-the-century farmer.

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Can you think of any examples from your experience, in your church, or your personal life in which relevance has crossed over the line into compromise? Is the Word of God still revered in those situations? Is purity compromised for the sake of peer pressure? Has pleasing people replaced pleasing God as the primary goal?

Take some time and think about some ways you can have empathy toward the culture but still maintain an unwavering commitment to biblical truth, especially in such areas as:

- Movies, TV, and the entertainment industry
- Art and music
- Political involvement
- Your attitude toward non-Christians



LET'S LIVE IT

When pastors and church leaders follow the meaningful ministry priorities above, they will provide an atmosphere where Christians can live as imitators of Christ. But we shouldn't leave the responsibility to our pastors alone to follow these ministry priorities. Each Christian must put these principles into action each day.

Are you committed to God's Word, living with authenticity, treating others with gentleness, and sharing the gospel of Christ in a relevant way? If so, how can you integrate these priorities into your life this week?



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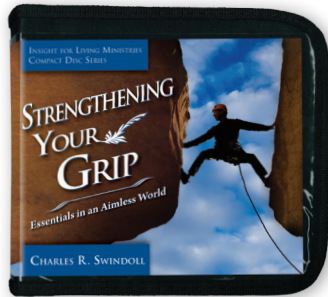
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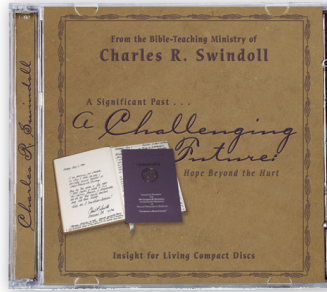
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Tools for Digging Deeper



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**A Significant Past . . .
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