

Encouragement for All of Life

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Date: 18 November 2018

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[0 : 00] It is so good to be here with you guys. Just a wonderful privilege to bring God's Word this morning. And I'm just, already my heart is full just worshiping with you guys and watching what God's doing in your Trinity Cambridge Church.

And I want to look at this passage this morning, 1 Thessalonians 1-10. And the title of the message is Encouragement for the Weary Christian. This is a wonderful book on encouragement. The first three chapters are just jam-packed, full of encouragement. And as we dive into this chapter, I just want to ask you the question, have you ever considered the importance of encouragement?

Have you ever thought about the importance of encouragement? Back in 1895, a 16-year-old boy bought his first camera. He took 50 photos, and of those 50 photos, only one turned out. It was a portrait of his sister at the piano. The other 49 pictures didn't work, and his father's response to him was, well, son, maybe you need to take up another hobby.

[1 : 12] But his mother saw something in that one photo that made a difference. That one photo of his sister was so beautiful that she said it compensated for the 49 failures, and encouraged him to go on and keep pursuing his hobby of photography.

This young boy's name was Edward. You might know him as Edward Steichen, probably, arguably, the most successful and famous photographer of the 20th century.

He worked for Condé Nast, Vogue, and Vénédie Faire. He won an Academy Award for a war documentary in 1945, and he was the director of photography at New York's Museum of Modern Art.

But he almost missed all that if it hadn't been for his mother's encouragement. His mother's encouragement made all the difference. This letter is a letter full of powerful encouragement for a weary church and weary Christians.

Paul has been with the Thessalonians some time previously, and his time with them was cut short. He had to leave. There was persecution that went on. It was a very successful time, so in proclaiming the good news of Christ, the truth of Christ crucified on the cross for our sins and risen from the dead, so he had been with the Thessalonians and had brought the gospel, him and his team, and it had had an effect.

[2 : 41] So there were people from Jewish backgrounds and non-Jewish backgrounds who had come to faith in Christ. A church had been formed, and within a relatively short amount of time, we don't know whether it was three weeks or three months, there was an angry mob, basically an anti-Christian mob, that was raised up and drove Paul out of the city, so he had to leave prematurely.

And so part of the background is that he's wondering how this church has been doing. He's worried about them, actually. You can read through the letter and see some of his angst. And what he does is he can't stand it, and he sends Timothy back to find out how they're doing.

Then Timothy is with them, and then he comes back to Paul and tells them that this church is doing well. And that's when Paul writes this letter. He writes this letter to them to encourage them, to strengthen them in their faith, because they're living really amidst persecution and challenge.

And so he spends three chapters here really just encouraging this church. And so what I want to do is I want to dig into this first chapter to learn about how he encourages the church.

I think there are some valuable lessons here in how to encourage. And I think with it, it's just the importance of encouragement. So this isn't here in Scripture just so we can learn about Paul and how much he loved this church and how much he wanted to encourage them.

[3 : 58] God gives us his word for our instruction. And he gives us his word today, and he is bringing his word through 1 Thessalonians 1 to you guys, to us as a church.

And I think through it wants to teach us about the importance of encouragement and actually equip us to encourage. So we're going to dig in. And I hope from this we learn that we're called to encourage our brothers and sisters by reminding them of God's activity in their lives.

We are called to encourage our brothers and sisters by reminding them of God's activity in their lives. And so we'll look at four things in this chapter. We remind them of evidences of faith, hope, and love.

So these core virtues. We remind them of the evidence that God loves and chooses them. So chosen by God. We remind them of evidence of godly character. And we remind them of the impact of their lives on others, compelling lives.

So four C's, core virtues, chosen by God, character, and compelling lives, if that helps you remember them. And good, we have them behind us. I didn't even know you had that. So let's dig in.

[5 : 00] First, Paul highlights core virtues. We see this in verse 3. He greets them, and there's a blessing there. And then he, that's certainly a common way to start a letter.

But then he goes from that place, and in his greeting, in his blessing, he's highlighting the grace and peace of God. And he is communicating to them that he gives thanks to God always.

The whole team does. Gives thanks to God always for all of them, constantly mentioning them in their prayers. This is strategic. Paul is not just repeating how he prays.

He wants them to know and be encouraged that he prays and gives thanks for them. He's communicating that. It's his heart for this church to give thanks to them, give thanks to God for them.

And he cites certain specific qualities about them. And just to pause for a minute and think about that. It's encouraging to know that people pray for you. I'm sure for us, we tell each other that.

[6 : 02] At times you've had someone say, I'm praying for you. And when you're going through a hard time, that can be really helpful, right? To know, boy, this person's praying for me. It just builds your faith. You don't feel as alone. But can you imagine to add to that, that someone says, not only do I pray for you, but actually I give thanks to God for your life.

When I think of you and your needs, I can't help but think of the qualities in your life that demonstrate God's activity. I can't help but think about your faith. I can't help but think about, as you're going through this trial, that you're looking to Jesus.

That's an incredible thing. And I'm thanking God for that. Think about adding that element when you share with somebody that you're praying for them, that you're actually giving thanks to God for them for certain qualities.

Think about the power of doing that for somebody that maybe you struggle with. Maybe there's someone, a brother or sister in Christ, who, as you relate to them, you're just challenged by certain things.

Maybe just personality. You rub each other the wrong way certain ways, and you have to work through that. Or maybe there was something that, in the past, it was difficult for you. Imagine the difference it would make to pray for them, and not only pray for them, but to give thanks to God for them as you pray.

[7 : 11] To spend time highlighting how you see God at work in their lives, thanking God for that. I think that would change our heart, wouldn't it, towards them? It would help us to have a different perspective, to think about the good things rather than the challenging things in their lives.

So that alone, just Paul's example right in the beginning, is, I think, really important, and practicing that can make a real difference in our lives. But Paul, in this, goes on to cite specific things in their lives as he thinks about them, as he prays for them, as he gives thanks for them.

He's remembering before our God and Father your work of faith, and labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you hear those three Christian virtues there? Paul uses these virtues often. Faith, hope, and love. These are qualities, characteristics of the Christian life. They are virtues, and they're really, in some ways, indicative of real life.

When the Lord works in somebody, when there's real life, when they hear the good news of Christ, they understand that Christ died for their sins and rose again to give new life, and when they have an encounter with God in light of that gospel, there's new life that comes into us, and there's faith in

that, and there's fruit from that.

[8 : 28] There's faith and hope and love. And so Paul is pointing out God's activity in their lives, this work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope.

Now, we don't know what the specific things that Paul was thinking about as he thought about those general qualities, those virtues, but we can guess. We can guess that in their lives, there's a work of faith, because we know that when there's faith in someone's life, there's always work that comes out of that.

When you believe in Christ, it isn't simply mental assent, yes, this is true. Biblical belief, biblical faith is not just saying, yes, I believe Christ is God in the flesh, died on the cross for our sins, rose again. I not only assent to that, it's more than that, it's I embrace that. I entrust my life to this truth. I desire this truth.

So biblical faith is more than just mental assent, it's embracing the truth, and that encounter changes us, and in that, there's something different and transforming about that, and it produces automatically, of course, work.

[9 : 39] So there's a work of faith for every genuine believer, and so for the Thessalonians, there were things that went on in their lives, there was works of faith, and no matter what that might be, it's there in every believer.

Every believer has some sort of work of faith, and it may be a work that's just amazing, and everyone can see that this person, you know, they gave up a career, a rich career, to serve the Lord in some sacrificial way, and they've laid down their lives, they're laboring in a place where it's just really hard, and, you know, there's not a whole lot of results, but they're serving the Lord gladly. There's those sorts of works of faith, and they're wonderful, but there are other works of faith in believers that are just maybe little things that we can look over. Think of the thief on the cross. The thief on the cross comes to faith in Christ on the cross.

He doesn't have a whole long life ahead of him to labor for the Lord, does he? But there is a work of faith for him on the cross. It's confessing with his mouth the truth about Jesus.

It's choosing not to mock Jesus, but to put his faith and depend on Jesus. So even just that expression of Jesus, remember me when you enter your kingdom, that's a work of faith.

[10 : 47] And so I would just say with that, every believer has a work of faith in their life that you can point out. And so Paul is pointing out in the Thessalonians that there's a work of faith. And so we can find works of faith in any believer because if they believe, there's something there.

If it's just a confession of dependence on the Lord or they're doing great works, whatever it might be, we can find ways to encourage them. So their work of faith. Their labor of love as well.

This church is loving one another. Paul's going to talk about that later in the letter. They are loving one another. They are people that are coming from diverse backgrounds, Jewish and Gentile backgrounds, probably all different levels of economic strata in society.

And they are coming together and they're loving one another. They're caring about one another. They're helping one another. They're affectionate for one another. And so there's a labor of love in their lives that he's pointing out.

And then there's a steadfastness of hope as well. That they are hoping. They are setting their hearts on the return of Christ, the ultimate victory of Christ. Not only that victory experienced now through faith and new life, but the final victory when he returns and he makes all things new.

[11 : 59] And so they're living in light of that. So that hope, that ultimate reality. And when you learn to live in light of that, it changes how you live in this life. It gives you ability to hold on in difficulty.

It gives you the ability to endure persecution. It gives you the ability to endure disappointments. Disappointments of different times. I, as a pastor, have been able to see a lot of people demonstrate steadfastness of hope amidst very difficult circumstances.

Really consider one of my greatest privileges as a pastor to be with people as they go through significant suffering and to watch that hope that the Lord's put in their hearts that sustains them. And it doesn't always look perfect. It's not that everyone I've been with has always been just, I'm just so full of faith. And I know God's going to work glory through this. That's not what it looks like. There's struggle. There's ups and downs. There's questioning of faith. There's doubts. But what I've seen in every genuine believer is this hope that sustains them. I remember one young husband, and I'll never forget it, a friend of mine who came with us when we started the church, planted in

2002, John.

[13:18] He got married, and he was excited about life, building a family with his wife. He actually talked about being on the first church plant that we would send out.

He was hoping to go north. He actually liked cold weather, so he wanted to somehow, if we could plant northward. Some of you guys are thinking, that's not the direction I want to go in. I want to go southward.

But he was excited about going north and being part of a plant. He was just a great brother in the church, and he got cancer. He was in his early 40s. And we watched as we prayed.

We asked God to heal. We had seen God heal someone with cancer in our church. And so we asked God for John, and God didn't heal him. And I was there in his last hours and days and last moments.

And he was disappointed. He didn't want to die. He wanted to live. He had a lot to live for, a lot of things he was excited about that God would do. But God sustained him in hope.

[14:17] And though he couldn't figure it out, he knew that ultimately I know God's good, and I know God's plans are the best, even though I don't understand. And so I was there with him, and his last words he repeated over and over again, really with his last breath, is, it's better this way.

And I just remember that. And that's a miracle. To be in that place of suffering and really the loss of your dreams, and to say and confess with your mouth, it's better this way.

And it's a confession of faith. I don't understand, but I trust the Lord, and my hope is in him. That's the steadfastness of hope. And that's a miracle. That's a miracle of the Lord at work. And brothers and sisters, I want you all to know that if you have put your faith in Jesus, he lives in you, and there's power in your life to walk in faith and hope and love.

They're there. There's a work of faith. There's a labor of love. There's steadfastness of hope in you. That's there. And so Paul is pointing it out to the Thessalonians. He's encouraging them.

He's reminding them of his core virtues. And we learn from that how to encourage one another. And so for us as brothers and sisters, your brothers and sisters, your friends need you to point those things out, to remind them of how you see faith, hope, and love in their lives, to find something in their lives.

[15:39] And if they're a believer, it's there somewhere. Even if it's just a tiny little thing, it's there. And as you encourage each other, as you remind each other of that, they're going to be strengthened. Their faith, hope, and love will be strengthened through your encouragement.

That's what Paul's doing here as he encourages them by reminding them of these core virtues. Next, he reminds them that they are chosen and beloved by God.

He says in verse 4, For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you. Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction. He's now pointing to the fact that God loves them and has chosen them.

And he wants to remind them of that. He says, We know, brothers, brothers loved by God, that he's chosen you. So they are beloved by God and they are chosen by God.

This is powerful encouragement and really should be part of our regular encouragement. To know and to be reminded that we are loved by God and chosen. Now, there's deep truth in these realities, being chosen of God.

[16:44] We know as we read through Scripture that God loves all people, desires that all would know him. But if someone doesn't come to Christ through faith, they can never live in that. They never live in knowing that he loves them, and they cannot know that he has loved them from eternity.

It's the blessing for the believer. And the response for the person who's yet to believe is, Well, if you want to know that you're loved by God and chosen of him, then simply come and believe. It's that simple.

God offers salvation and his love to whosoever should respond. And so this truth of being loved and chosen from before time and loved of God, chosen before time to belong to him, is not meant to confound and confuse people who don't yet believe.

It's meant as a comfort and encouragement for those who do. We don't know who's going to believe. We don't know who's chosen ultimately unless they've come to faith. And if we see in their lives the things that Paul sees, the work of the Holy Spirit, conviction and faith, we can't say.

But if that's there, we can say, this one is loved and chosen of God. I've heard the illustration. I think it's a helpful one. There's a doorway into the kingdom, into heaven, into belonging to God's family. [18:00] And on the front of the doorway as you come from the outside, it says, whosoever would believe. Whosoever. And when you walk through that doorway, you look back and on the other side of the doorway, it says, chosen of God.

And so the invitation for all is to believe. But once you believe, you can live in the assurance that you actually, behind your believing, behind your choice, which is a valid choice, God uses our choices, they're real choices, but behind that choice is God's choice of you.

That God has loved you from eternity and he's chosen you. That's powerful encouragement, isn't it? To know, to know that he's loved me and chose me and I can stand on that. I can stand on that when I go up and down in my experience, I'm discouraged and I'm not always a faithful Christian. As I face difficulty, I can stand on the fact that God has loved me and chosen me. That's what Paul's doing with his friends in Thessalonica. He's reminding them of this reality that they are loved and chosen of God.

The verification of that is the fact that when the good news came to them, it wasn't just words, it wasn't just an idea, it wasn't just a philosophy, but it was something powerful that it impacted their lives and the Holy Spirit worked in their lives and brought conviction.

[19:22] They realized, this message is not just a message, it's the message for me. And they believed. And so behind this believing, behind this experience, is actually God at work.

It's God who has works that they might believe. Their belief, their response, their repentance, the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives is a sign that their beloved and chosen of God.

That's a powerful encouragement. It's a powerful encouragement to know that, boy, my faith, as little as it seems at times and as much as I might struggle, actually is a miracle of God that shows that God has loved me from eternity before I existed.

And He's chosen me. He chose to rescue me in Jesus. He's the one who chose that I would hear this good news and that I would believe and respond. Again, this meant as a comfort and encouragement for believers not to confuse and confound those who don't yet believe in Christ.

It's an encouragement here in 1 Thessalonians. That's what Paul's doing. He's wanting to point this out that they would be strengthened by this, that they would stand on this. It's really amazingly good news.

[20:40] I don't know if you guys have followed the Mega Millions recently. And who here knows what the Mega Millions, you don't have to raise your hand if you don't want to, but Mega Millions, so it's a state lottery, but like in all the states, I think, but two.

And recently, it was \$1.5 billion. And someone in South Carolina won it, and yet they haven't come forward yet. They have, I think, like until April to come forward, so I think they're putting together financial consultants and stuff.

But \$1.5 billion. Can you imagine being the person who happens to have that ticket? And by the way, I'm not suggesting you go out and buy lottery tickets, so don't hear what I'm not saying. But imagine if you had that. I don't know about you, but I thought a little bit about what if I were the one that had \$1.5 billion, what would I do with it?

And I was thinking about all sorts of godly, glorious things, just so you know, what I would do with the money. But it was just to think, wow, \$1.5 billion. And to know that I'm, like, I have the ticket.

[21:44] Well, in Jesus, because God has loved you and chosen you, you have something far greater than \$1.5 billion. And it isn't one in 300 million.

You have been chosen by God and every believer, the countless number of believers have been chosen by God to have this inheritance. And so you have it now. You are loved of God.

You are chosen of God. The God who's made the whole universe, whose resources are limitless, has decided in his great love and mercy to rescue you, to make you his own.

That's encouraging. And Paul's reminding them of this truth. And so we learn from this, don't we? That if we want to encourage others, we remind each other of this reality.

And just think of how helpful that can be. If somebody's struggling, you just point out and say, you know, I know you're struggling, I know you feel down, but I just want to remind you that I see God's life in you and therefore I know that he's at work and therefore I know that he's chosen you and he loves you and he's for you.

[22 : 53] God is for you. I don't understand all that's going on, but I know he's for you. He's chosen you. You belong to him. That's what Paul's doing here in 1 Thessalonians. And I think from that, that's what we're called to do in each other's lives, to remind each other of this wonderfully good news that we're beloved and chosen of God.

Thirdly, character. In verse 5, in the latter half of 5, he says, you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake and you became imitators of us and of the Lord for you received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

Paul talks about how the Thessalonians were imitators of this team, this apostolic team that had been there. They showed the same level of character that his team showed by receiving the word even though there was a lot of public pressure.

They received the word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit. So he's pointing out that these guys had maturity like the team in that they held the word of God as a higher value than the approval of men, even if it meant actual persecution.

So he's pointing out in them this miracle of a faith in the word of God and a submission to the word of God that would be held even amidst the pressure of a broken world.

[24 : 20] So these guys are believing when it's not popular at all. Actually, it's dangerous to believe. And he's encouraging them by reminding them of this.

He's pointing it out. He's saying, you guys are just like us and actually you're just like the Jerusalem church, these people that we've told you stories about who are enduring a lot of persecution for the sake of Christ.

You're just like them. You've come to the same understanding that to belong to Christ and to possess Christ and forgiveness and life and to live under the king is worth far more than anything this world might offer.

And because you're getting that, you're willing to endure the world opposing you. You're willing to endure the loss of property, the loss of status, all these things. He's pointing that out about them that they demonstrate this Christian character that they're willing to endure all these things for the sake of Christ.

That's character. That's a work of God. That's a miracle. And that's the reality really for every believer. If you're going to follow Jesus, if the world rejected Christ and crucified him, then we should expect nothing really that different as believers.

[25 : 29] And if you're going to follow Jesus, that's part of the reality. The world does not want Jesus, at least the whole Jesus. The world, I think, at times, likes kind of the morality of Jesus.

They like the idea, love your neighbor, be respectful to others. All these ethics that come with following Jesus, I mean, people love his teaching on ethics, but they don't listen to the whole thing because there's more to it than just that.

There's himself and who he is. He is Lord of all. He is the only way to the Father. There's no righteousness apart from Christ. Only in him is there forgiveness and life and righteousness. There's no other way. He teaches that clearly. So the world tends to ignore that part. We don't like that because we want the good things. We want the morality. We want the wisdom, the stability, perhaps, that that brings, but we don't want God himself.

And to be a believer of a follower of Christ means to go too far with this thing for a lot of people. The world wants morality, but they don't want God himself.

[26 : 35] And they want you to be a good neighbor, to be kind, but not go overboard about Jesus. It's kind of like a child that maybe is living at home and thinking, you know, I love living at home because I get to use the car.

I get, you know, I get nice food. I get to go on nice vacations, but I really can't stand my parents and I don't want to be around them at all. That's kind of the idea. If we want morality without God, that's what we're doing.

And that's kind of the world's way with these things. And so to be a Christian means to go against this mindset, to kind of go overboard, where they, to be not only interested in being like Jesus in ethics, but being a devoted follower of Christ.

It's popular to be a respecter of Jesus, but not an earnest follower. It's popular to be spiritual, but to do so in private, not be a public Christian. And often for, to be a Christian, it's okay to be a Christian just to kind of keep it to yourself and don't get too serious, don't join a church.

That's just, that's what's out there in the world. That's kind of in the culture. And so Paul is encouraging the Thessalonians because they're facing things like that that are even more severe than what we face.

[27 : 53] And he's encouraging them. You guys are choosing to follow Jesus even amidst persecution. And I just want to say that for you guys here at Trinity Cambridge Church, you guys are choosing to follow Jesus even though it's not popular in the culture.

and your presence here is a statement that you're interested in following him and you don't care what it means for the culture. You're willing to deal with the opposition of the culture.

You're willing to follow him and be serious about believing and obeying and be serious about the things he calls you to like being a church, being together, loving one another, worshiping on Sundays, meeting during the week, praying for each other, and being faithful to represent Christ to the world not just by loving them and being a good neighbor and doing the things that they might like, but sharing and proclaiming the good news that he is God in the flesh.

He is the rightful king of all. And that's a wonderful thing. It's a glorious thing and I'm so glad that you guys are doing that here in East Cambridge. And I would want you to hear God's pleasure in what you're doing.

and to see that you're demonstrating a high level of Christian maturity by even doing what you're doing here right now today, coming together, being together to worship, being under his word together, saying, Jesus, you're Lord.

[29 : 17] We believe you. We want all of you. And we want to make you known in the world. That's a wonderful thing and it's an encouragement. It's an encouragement for your fellow believers to see this.

Just yesterday, I was up in Maine with about 150 pastors and church leaders and they're throughout Maine in rural areas and they're doing the same thing. And I came away with the number one thing was it's just a privilege to be with these guys because they're doing the same thing all throughout Maine.

They're representing Christ all throughout Maine, being faithful in a culture that doesn't want them to be faithful. So Paul encourages the Thessalonians here and we should also remind each other of this and encourage each other in this to point out these things and say thank you.

Thank you for being a regular part of a small group. Thank you for being part of the church. Thank you for your faith and maturity to make involvement in the local church and following Christ a priority.

So pointing out that sort of godly character. And then finally, Paul points out to the Thessalonians their example, their compelling lives. So in verse 7 and following, he says, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.

[30 : 35] For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere so that we need not say anything for they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

So Paul is pointing out to the Thessalonians this church that you guys are your conversion and your devotion to the Lord has been made known throughout Macedonia.

So they're in the area of Macedonia. That's where Thessalonica is. But also Achaia, so that's further south down near Corinth. And not only that, but it's gone beyond and other people are telling us basically about you guys.

Your life, your faith, your desire to follow the Lord, your desire to love your neighbors and share Christ with your neighbors even though they may persecute you is being made known throughout the region.

Your conversion, your change from following idols to following Jesus, that story has been spread abroad. That's what Paul's saying about the Thessalonians. And again, why is he saying this?

[31 : 50] He's wanting to encourage them. He's wanting to point out evidences of God's grace in their lives. He wants them to be aware of the miracle of God's activity in their midst so they'd be strengthened and encouraged because life is hard for the Thessalonians.

They're dealing with persecution. They're dealing with challenges. The normal challenges we may face and even more added to that, the opposition of their culture. And so he wants to point out to

them that God is at work and people are seeing that. they're seeing God at work. And it's wonderful to hear stories of God's activity. It's an encouragement to others to watch God at work.

And I was recently reading the biography of John Patton. John Patton was a missionary to the New Hebrides in the South Pacific near Fiji back in like 1860.

And back then, those islands were full of people that were cannibals. And they were not only cannibals but they were brutal. Like their culture was brutal. It was a warfare culture. They were constantly fighting each other.

[32 : 56] They would lie and deceive. Like someone might tell, well John Patton, they would tell him, oh brother, we're glad you're here and they use polite language. We want missionaries here because they bring good things.

And then like the next day they would try to kill him. The same guy who said that would try to kill him. And so it was a culture that was just brutal and dark. And John Patton went there and he was faithful, went through all sorts of persecution.

His wife died, his friends were murdered, he was driven off of one island but he went back and he kept on loving them and then God broke through. And basically on the island he was, where he was, they all came to faith.

And it was after some years. And just the, it was an amazing story of conversion and new life on that island and then started to spread to all the other islands. And then John Patton actually took that story and went around the world and really inspired the missions movement of the late 1800s by telling the story of conversion and fruit on those islands.

And so there's an impact when we hear about God's activity. When we, when we hear about how he's at work, it encourages us. And so Paul is pointing out to the Thessalonians that, you know what, you guys may not know this but your story is being told all around.

[34 : 11] And it is having an impact on others. And he's seeking to encourage them through that. Well, you may not know this Trinity Cambridge but your story is having an impact.

And just to start with my own life, I was reflecting with my wife. We lived in the city back in the 80s and the early 90s. We lived in Rosendale and then we lived on Mission Hill. and I was an elder in a church, a River of Life church in Jamaica Plain.

And we used to meet with pastors in the city and other churches to pray for the city. And at that time, I was only aware of one other church in Cambridge, one church in Cambridge that loved the gospel and was making, was seeking to proclaim the gospel.

Only one in all of Cambridge that I know of. Now there may have been another one but, so maybe two but that was it. And I would imagine there was nothing in East Cambridge at all.

And during that time, actually, there were hardly any churches in the city that loved the gospel and were seeking to have an impact in their neighborhoods. And yet, God's been at work, hasn't he?

[35 : 24] And you guys are here in 2018 in East Cambridge. And there are other churches in Cambridge proclaiming the gospel and seeking to love their neighbors and make Christ known. And so just the, it's just amazing for me to step back and think about what God's doing and that you guys exist here and that you're imaging Christ in East Cambridge.

That's a wonderful encouragement and it's to the glory of God. So you may not be aware of all that God's been doing but he's been at work and he's been answering the prayers of those pastors and churches back in the 80s that asked the Lord to come and impact the Boston area and you are an answer to that prayer in many ways.

And certainly I know that among our family of churches and Sovereign Grace churches and elsewhere I would expect as well they know about what God's doing in East Cambridge that he's planted a church and he's growing a church in this part of the world that maybe among Americans at least would be least likely a place for a church to thrive and yet here you are growing and thriving and God's at work.

And I hope that you're encouraged by that even as the Thessalonians were encouraged. So just as I close out this message I just want to encourage you to think of how you can encourage others as you learn from 1 Thessalonians chapter 1.

First, to know that your brothers and sisters need your encouragements. We are all struggling in a world that's opposed to God in our own flesh our fallen nature is opposed we struggle the world opposes us the enemy opposes us and apart from encouragement the ministry of encouragement we would lose strength and we would be weary.

[37 : 10] And how does God encourage us? He uses our brothers and sisters. And so I would encourage you first just to think about your call to encourage others. That the Lord would want to use you and call you to encourage others.

And then the next question is well how do I do that? 1 Thessalonians chapter 1. This is how you do it. Look how Paul did it. He encouraged them by reminding them of these core virtues faith, hope, and love.

He encouraged them by reminding them of evidence that God loves them and chose them. So chosen of God. He encouraged them by reminding them of evidence of godly character.

And then finally he reminded them of the impact of their lives on others. So four ways we can encourage each other. So just as I close I just want to encourage you to take a minute right now and think about what God would call you to do in terms of encouragement.

Is there maybe somebody that you can encourage today or this next week? Maybe there's some just even like Lord I want to be somebody that encourages others.

[38 : 16] I want to apply this word this way. So just take a minute to reflect and then the guys will leave us the rest of the time. Thank you.