

Give Thanks in All Circumstances

1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18

Key Verse: 5: 18

“Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

On his second missionary journey, Paul with Silas and Timothy visited Thessalonica, a busy seaport and the capital of Macedonia (Acts 17). When Paul preached in the synagogue, proclaiming Jesus as Christ who had to suffer and rise from the dead, a few Jews, many Greeks and some prominent women believed. But the unbelieving Jews were jealous and they incited a mob to attack the home that had welcomed Paul. So he had to leave town quickly, before grounding the new believers adequately in the word of God. In his absence, Paul agonized over the little ones that had been ripped from his care. He loved his bible students so much... and they him. Paul knew the enemies of Christ would be hard at work to discredit the Gospel and lead these Christians away from the truth. So he sent to find out about their faith and when Timothy came back bringing a wonderful report, Paul rejoiced and thanked God.

Like the Thessalonians, we Christians today experience the same physical, social, mental, and spiritual persecution. The tempter is still busy trying to tempt us in some way.

But Jesus said in John 16:33b, **“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”**

Jesus died for our sins, was buried, rose again, ascended into heaven and is coming again to take all those in Him to the eternal Kingdom of God with blessings and rewards far more than we can imagine.

When this glorious living hope of Jesus second coming is deeply planted in our hearts and souls we can rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances.

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First: Rejoice Always.

What! –Always- Impossible. Sometimes... maybe... but always? Why is it so difficult to be joyful always or is it? So to answer this it's good to remember the difference between worldly joy and spiritual joy. Worldly joy is dependent on an outcome that makes me happy. It's an emotion solely based solely on the fragile and empty hope in this relativistic world. When conditions are favorable, I'm happy, happy, happy.

I got an A on my paper-happy; I got a good job-happy; I married the man or woman of my dreams-happy. But what happens when you get a C, or if you're one of the 20,000 people that lose their job everyday or your dream turns into a nightmare? The joy that depended on happiness vanished and anger, bitterness, resentment can take root. Still some find joy in the fleeting pleasures of sin that lasts for a season after which pain and regret take over.

Spiritual joy on the other hand, is the opposite of worldly joy.

As Christians, we can rejoice always because our joy isn't based on circumstances, but on what Jesus did for me and what he is going to do for me. Circumstances change, but Almighty God never changes.

The Garden of Eden means Joy or Delight. God created us in his image to always be joyful. We crave that joy but sin robs us of the joy. King David was a man after God's own heart. He was a shepherd king he had God's vision for his people and his nation. He whole-heartedly served God's mission. But when the joy of God was no longer in his heart sin took its place. The consequences of his sin were great. But it was God's training. Jesus says in Revelation 3:19 **“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.”** When David earnestly repented, God forgave him and restored to him the joy of his salvation (Psalm 51:2A). Rejoice appears 154 times in the Bible, David proclaimed it 43 times.

“Re” is a great prefix. Restore, Recharge, Revival. “Re” means to come back to or again. Many of you have a compass on your phone. The first time you use it you have to calibrate it. You move it around until it finds

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and then points to the North Pole. The next time you want to use it you have calibrate again or recalibrate.

Sometimes we can lose our spiritual joy but rejoice reminds us to come back to the joy of salvation we have in Jesus. Recalibrate our spiritual compass to point to The Kingdom of God as we look forward to the vivid, dynamic, second coming of our Lord Jesus.

Second: Pray Continually

Prayer is communication with God. It's a two way conversation involving talking and listening. Sorry, no text messages, emails, tweets. But Jesus is always sending us a friend request. Prayer is communion and fellowship with our Father who deeply loves His children. It is our declaration that God is the source of everything that is good and I am utterly dependent on Him. How much we depend on God is equal to how much we pray. Verse 17 says **“pray continually”** which is different from continuously or 24/7. God wants us to come to him continually, not randomly. **“Continually”** means at regular or frequent intervals, again and again, without giving up.

Prayer is a great privilege given to us through Jesus. When Jesus died on the cross God himself ripped open the curtain that separated sinners from The Most Holy Place. Now by the grace of Jesus we can come directly and with confidence to Almighty Holy God. No barriers, no appointment, no internet connection, anytime, anywhere. Amazing!

Jesus should be our model of what continual prayer looks like. The Bible says Jesus always got up early in the morning and went off to a solitary place to pray. If the Holy Son of God did this how much more should we. Satan rules this world. We are on the front lines of a spiritual battlefield that is hostile to Christians of every stripe- new/mature, young/old. From the moment we get up the tempter is trying to redirect our spiritual joy and thanksgiving from God... to the world. Separating us from the love of God for eternity is his only goal. In Luke 18:1 Jesus told his disciples that they should always pray and not give up. When Peter did not pray, Satan sifted him like wheat. This can happen to anyone who does not

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pray according to God's will. If we pray sporadically or from time to time, we will be vulnerable to Satan's attack. Just like Peter, Satan knows our weak points very well. When we pray continually, God gives us the Holy Spirit, Satan flees, and what remains are the blessed fruits of the spirit such as love, joy and peace.

The majority of the people in Thessalonica were idol-worshipping pagans who lived in passionate lust. The Christians were a small minority who had turned from idols to serve the living and true God. They looked weak, helpless and boring to the 200,000 people around them. You would think the majority would care less about this small band of so-called nobodies but instead they hated and persecuted them.

Jesus explains this in John 15:18-19, **“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you”**.

Has anything changed in 2,000 years? The world still hates us and prayer is still our power source. Throughout history, each time a Christian got on their knees they were saying, God is in charge, our faith is in Jesus, and we are not giving into the world.

Immediately after 26 Christians were shot and killed in Church, the haters sprung into persecution with comments like “if prayers worked they'd still be alive” and “they had the prayers shot right out of them maybe try something else.” While another person, who lost multiple friends and family members, said, “We are praying for you are the sweetest words I have ever heard”. The pastor of the Church who lost his 14-year-old daughter said, “Keep your eyes up, keep your head up, and focus on Christ”.

To those who stand firm in their faith in Jesus there will be total and complete victory and for all others complete justice when Jesus comes again. Jesus says in Revelation 3:11-12, **“I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of**

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my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name”

Here at UBF, you will hear these three things many times: “Please pray for me, I’ll pray for you, and thank- you for your prayers”. Each of these statements reveal an attitude toward God in which we recognize Him as Almighty, Sovereign God who hears us, can help us anytime, in any situation. It’s not over until God says it’s over. So if you have forgotten to pray for someone, repent with me, and next time pull out your phone “Siri, remind me in a hour to pray for David”. It’s much better to pray for someone before you’re painfully reminded that you didn’t by the words “thank you for your prayers”.

We are truly blessed at UBF to have such mature prayer warriors. They are an excellent example of continual prayer that is pleasing to God, prayer that is aligned with God’s will, prayer that is specific, and prayer that God answers.

My spiritual mother, M. Helen Kim is one of them. About five or so years ago, she told me at one of our fellowship meetings at Northeastern “I’m praying for you to be a Sunday messenger.” It caught me off guard because I surely wasn’t praying for that. But what was really mysterious to me was her attitude. It was as if God had already answered her prayers. Well guess what... He had!

1 John 5:14, 15 says, **“This is the confidence that we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.”**

Third: Be Thankful in All Circumstances

Look at verse 18. **“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”**

God made us and he provides everything for us. There are so many things to be thankful for that we may forget... until it is taken from us. For example, when was the last time you thanked God for air? If you dedicated

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just one day a year thanking God for every breath you took that'd be about 18,000 thank you's.

Above all, we must thank God who solved our problem of sin and death through the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ. John 3:16 says **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** God's love was to sacrifice His Son in time and space to give us eternal life. It's always ours no matter what our circumstance, situation, or problem. We can always come to God thru Jesus.

When we fully trust God, especially in trials, we will thank Him both for His great salvation and for the opportunity to see Him work in and through our lives.

No matter what circumstance we can give thanks to God because our thankfulness is anchored to our relationship in Christ rather than to the circumstances of life.

Just a few days before Paul and Silas arrived in Thessalonica, the leaders in Philippi had severely flogged them. Then they threw them into a prison. Bloodied with feet in stocks they began praying and singing thanksgiving hymns to God while the other prisoners were listening on. Then God did an amazing miracle (Acts 16:19-24). Although Paul and Silas had suffered much, they were thankful to God regardless of their circumstance. God gave them courage to go on telling the good news about Jesus to the Thessalonians. The Thessalonian Church would later become the springboard in which the Gospel would reach Eastern Europe! When we thank God He blesses all the more.

About 4 years later Paul said in Romans 8:28, **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”**

This month we are celebrating Thanksgiving. We want to remember our Pilgrim ancestors as we think about why God wants his people to give thanks in all circumstances. The pilgrims wanted to separate from the

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Church of England because they told people how to worship and what to preach and teach. Ordinary people did not read the Bible. There was no freedom of religion or freedom of speech. The Church of England branded them as fanatics and criminals because they wanted to worship according to the God of the Bible. Persecution became intolerable. God led a large number of them to seek asylum in Holland and after 12 hard years God opened the door to America. William Bradford was a Pilgrim leader. He wrote in his journal the reason he wanted to go to America. "Because he had a great hope that God would use them and those who followed them to carry the Light of Christ to remote parts of the world." This first Thanksgiving in 1621 was a day full of joy and thanks. They worshiped and thanked God who had brought them to a new land and enabled them to survive. They suffered and many of them died, but they left behind an American Christian legacy that was the birth of a world- wide revival. Through many thousands of sacrificial missionaries, the Gospel of Jesus was carried to the whole world. We are honored and thankful to count our own Mother Barry as one of those missionaries. We can give thanks in all circumstances when we see God's hand working in and among us. We remember and give thanks.

However, some people do not thank God in spite of all his goodness and grace. We saw this in Exodus, God delivered his chosen people from slavery in Egypt by the ten miraculous plagues. Then God led them across the Red Sea to dry ground, while the Egyptians who tried to do the same thing drowned. You would think after experiencing such a great deliverance they would be thankful in every circumstance! But after three days into the wilderness, they started grumbling about the water then they complained about the food choices. They even threatened to stone Moses and go back to slavery in Egypt. The grumblers and complainers wandered in the desert for many years until they died there. None of them saw the Promised Land. Ingratitude is a serious matter. It is God's will that we be thankful. God doesn't want his people to be grumblers or complainers. He wants us to be thankful. The Bible tells us that pride and un-thankfulness is at the root of sin. (Ro 1:19-20) When we are proud and unthankful, our foolish hearts are darkened and our thinking becomes futile.

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Hello my name is David Saethre. I'd like to share with you God's Grace and Mercy in my life through my Lord and Savior Jesus.

In 1984, Hannah Cooper invited me to Bible Study when I was a student at Northeastern. I studied for a year even inviting my girlfriend on a first date to bible study. A year later, I graduated, I took a job with a Big 4 accounting firm and began living like the idol worshipping Thessalonians. I eventually moved to Florida but after 5 years, I became restless and moved back to Chicago with my family. We arrived before the moving truck and I needed to print some things so I went to my Alma matter. When I got there the print server was down. After calling curses down on Northeastern and I went to grab a coffee to cool off vowing under my breath to never to return. As I was sitting there, M Moody Kim asked me if he could share the gospel key verses with me. I said sure and afterward he took me to the Center so I could print my stuff. For eight years He and M Helen patiently cared, loved, prayed, and had Bible Study with our family driving 1 hour round trip before see any fruit. There never was a hint of grumbling- only joy. Then by God's grace and sovereign will the wonderful light of Jesus came into our hearts and God's image began to be restored in us. Over the years there have trials and hardships. I had lost millions of dollars by leaving a company in Florida that later became AOL. But Maria and I have always been comforted that knowing if I had stayed we would have gained the whole world but lost our salvation. It is through the glorious hope in Jesus second coming that we can give thanks in all circumstances and rejoice in serving college students.

Let's all make a decision by faith to rejoice always, pray continually and give thanks to God in all circumstances for we know this is God's great and perfect will for each of us in Christ Jesus.