

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5waffTnMH6g>

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 *“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

We are going to conclude our meander through 1 Thessalonians 5: 16 - 18 by looking at how and why we should give *“give thanks in all circumstances”*.

“So, how do we start to give thanks in all circumstances?”

In the Zoom invitation this week I asked you to think of five things you are thankful for. The list you have created may have included your family or friends, good health, good job or the blessing of living in such a beautiful bit of the country. All of these things are good, and we should be thankful for all of them. However, I think we have tendency to take these everyday blessings from God for granted. There is in our society a sense of entitlement where many of these blessings are no longer viewed as something out of the ordinary but in some way our birth right. Yet these blessings we have and take for granted are not shared by all people in our world. Here are a few of the blessings that many of us, but not all God's children share.

If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of the people in this world.

If you have money in the bank, in your wallet and spare change in a dish someplace, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the tens of thousands of people who will die this week, many of easily curable diseases, starvation or violence.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 500 million people in the world today.

If you can attend church meetings without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death, you are more blessed than three billion in the world.

I understand it is hard to sometimes truly appreciate these blessing because they are so ubiquitous, they surround us, they are part of everyday life in Britain. It can take a shock to the system to really show us just how blessed we are; we don't really appreciate our health until we become ill or as many have found we don't truly appreciate the blessing of time spent with family until Covid 19 took it away. Covid 19 has been a shock to many, dismantling their cherished comforts and everyday blessings that they took for granted. There is, at least amongst some, a thankfulness for what they had prior to Covid 19. However, most people are looking forward to the lifting of the lock down and the opportunity to return their cherished past life. There is amongst society still no thankfulness for the blessings they have today.

As we all know us human beings are prone to covetousness, we tend to focus on what we *don't* have. However, by giving thanks we are reminded of how much we *do* have. When we focus on blessings rather than wants, we are happier. When we start thanking God for the things we usually take for granted, our perspective changes. We realize that we could not even exist without the merciful blessings of God.

To start to "give thanks in all circumstances" we need to count all the blessings we truly have today.

"So, why is giving thanks to God important?"

The answer is twofold. Firstly, we need to remember that although it is Paul who is telling us to "rejoice always", "pray continually" and "give thanks in all circumstances" he concludes with, "*for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus*". These commands are not just Paul's good ideas, this is how God wants you to live your life "*Rejoicing always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances in Christ Jesus*".

In case you think it is just here in Paul's letter to Thessalonians that we are commanded to give thanks, you will find that the whole Bible is littered with commands to give thanks to God (Psalm 106:1; 1 Chronicles 16:34; Ephesians 5: 19 - 20) and

the list goes on. The command to “give thanks in all circumstances” is not a suggestion but a command for everybody who is in Christ Jesus.

Secondly, feeling and expressing thankfulness is good for us. Like any wise father, God wants us to learn to be thankful for all the gifts He has given us and we need to remember he gives good gifts. **James 1:17** *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights”*. It is in our best interest to be reminded that everything blessing have is a gift from God. Without gratitude, we can become arrogant and self-centred. We begin to believe that we have achieved everything on our own. Thankfulness keeps our hearts in right relationship to the Giver of all good gifts.

But, how do we honestly give thanks when we face difficult situations and circumstances in our lives? As we have seen over the last two weeks the Believers Paul was writing to in Thessaloniki were experiencing very difficult circumstances including poverty, persecution and social isolation. Is it really fair of Paul to expect the Believers to give thanks in these circumstances? The answer is yes, Paul did want the Believers to give thanks in all circumstances. Paul wanted them to give thanks because God is found in each and every circumstance. Paul did not want the Thessalonian Believers to give thanks because they were being persecuted or poor or shunned or hated. No, the Bible never tells us to give thanks for injustices, but we are told to give thanks in them. Paul commands and God will is that we are to give thanks “in” all circumstances not “for” all circumstances.

When Gillian was diagnosed with lung cancer God didn't want me to give thanks for Gillian's illness. What God wanted was for me to give thanks in that most horrible of circumstance. God will was for me was to give thanks for friends who cooked me and Lucas meals every night, for friends who baby sat Lucas at weekends so I could do the three hour round trip to see Gillian in hospital, to give thanks for the nursery staying open late to look after Lucas so I didn't have to worry about getting back to pick him up. To thank God that he walked beside me each and every moment of every day. To thank Him that I could tell Him of our family's hearts pain, fear and at times hopelessness and to know that he understood and bore that pain with us. To thank him that in that circumstance where I knew I could never be the husband and father

that my family needed me to be, that He had sent a Helper to give me the strength I needed for that day to be husband and father.

Three Things to Consider About Giving Thanks In All Circumstances

Firstly, we give thanks because in every circumstance, whether it be victory or tragedy, loss or gain, joy or grief comes with the reality of finding God. Our greatest struggle, our most demanding test, every difficult question, we can give thanks to God because He is with us right in the middle of it all. When we look beyond our circumstance, we will see God. **Joshua 1:9** *“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go”*

Secondly, we give thanks because the Lord understands and feels what we are feeling. He is not aloof, not unconcerned or emotionally disconnected from us. We have a High Priest, Jesus who is able to sympathise with our every weakness or as we read in **Psalms 68:19**

*“Praise be to the Lord, to God our Saviour,
who daily bears our burdens.*

Thirdly, we give thanks in all circumstances because we are not alone. Jesus promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us, and He would give us the Holy Spirit as comforter and helper.

John 14:15 - 16

“If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth.”

The Holy Spirit is with us in every circumstance we face today or will face tomorrow, we are never alone in whatever circumstances we find ourselves in.

The Result of Giving God Thanks in All Circumstances

When we understand our thanksgiving to God doesn't rely on the circumstances around us, but rather, the strength we find from a good God in those circumstances. Then we will discover that giving thanks to God in all circumstances creates security and hope, it keeps our heart healthy and our relationship with God pure.

The circumstances we face may be grim and our questions may go unanswered but if we give thanks in the middle of these circumstances, we will come to know God in ways we could never imagine.

Paul's heart desire for the Believers in Thessaloniki was that they would fulfil God's will for their lives, that their eyes would be fixed on God, "*rejoicing always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances*" so that they would shine as brightly as God's dearly beloved children. As those Believers shone in the darkness of Thessaloniki, they would testify in their everyday life that God is living and active, that God is good and that God is greater than our circumstances.