

Simple Instructions for Giving Thanks

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

December 1st, 2019

Intro

We appreciate it when someone can take something complex and boil it down to simple terms and put the cookies on a lower shelf.

Parenting . . . give them lots of love and discipline them when they do wrong.

Finances . . . spend less than you make.

We can make the Christian life pretty complicated. Life is complex. The well of doctrine is deep. The Bible is big. We just finished a study on the massive book of Isaiah that has some pretty confusing sections. I thought it would be good to mix it up by looking at something very simple. At least, simple to read. Simple to understand in general terms. A little more challenging to do.

Matthew Henry: "Here we have short exhortations, that will not burden our memories, but will be of great use to direct the motions of our hearts and lives; for the duties are of great importance"

In other words, they're not hard to remember, but they sure are important.

In fact, it contains the shortest verse in the Bible – rejoice always – even shorter than Jesus wept if you go by the original Greek. So there's your Bible trivia for today.

1. **Rejoice** always (5:16)
 - a. The believers in Thessalonica experienced hardship from the very beginning and yet they were told to rejoice.
 - i. **1 Thessalonians 1:6** You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,
 - ii. **1 Thessalonians 2:14** For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen,
 - b. It can be difficult to understand how we are to rejoice always.
 - i. Seems contrived or phony, like we're wearing a mask that we are always "happy."
 - ii. We might feel like the Bible is disconnected from our real life and doesn't understand hardship, suffering, depression, and discouragement.
 - c. Paul, the author of this book under the inspiration of the Spirit, certainly understood.
 - i. Eyesight failing
 1. **Galatians 4:13-15** but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; ¹⁴ and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, . . . if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.
 - ii. People abandoned him
 1. **2 Timothy 4:16** ¹⁶ At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them.
 - iii. He experienced great poverty, affliction, and misunderstanding

1. **2 Corinthians 6:4-10** but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, ⁵ in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, ⁶ in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, ⁷ in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, ⁸ by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; *regarded* as deceivers and yet true; ⁹ as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, ¹⁰ as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.
 2. In some ways “sorrow” and “rejoicing” can coexist.
- d. We are to rejoice “in the Lord” not in our circumstances.
 - i. **Philippians 4:4** Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!
 - ii. “Rejoicing” is consistently “in the Lord” and not related to the circumstances of this life.
- e. We can rejoice because our eternal future is certain.
 - i. **Luke 10:20** "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."
 - ii. *Are you still saved? If yes, then “rejoice”!*
 - iii. **1 Peter 1:5-6** who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,
- f. We can rejoice because the Holy Spirit produces joy within us.
 - i. **Galatians 5:22-23a** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control;
- g. This command is intentionally simple, but the Bible doesn’t have a simplistic view of emotions.
 - i. We see psalms of lament, modeling the way people cry out to God when life hurts and is confusing.
 - ii. Characters in the Bible weep, experience anger, become despondent and discouraged, and express confusion about life.
- h. How do we most often violate this simple command?
 - i. Constantly criticizing and fault finding
 - ii. Constantly dwelling on our own sin and failings (as real as they are) rather than rejoicing in forgiveness.
2. **Pray** without ceasing (5:17)
 - a. We begin to see how these commands are not isolated but linked together.
 - i. How can we find relief and joy in times of hardship? One key ingredient is continuing to pray.
 - b. The adverb translated “without ceasing” or “continuously” was used of a hacking cough.
 - i. You know what that’s like to have a persistent cough that lingers, always in the background.
 - ii. if we’re quiet long enough we’ll probably hear a hacking cough in this room . . .
 - iii. we are to pray *like that*. Persistent, in the background, woven into our lives.

- c. What does this look like in real life to have a rhythm of prayer?
 - i. Quick prayers for people around you, praying in the middle of difficult conversations, thanking God for little moments of grace in your day, on-the-spot confession when you realize you sin in action, thoughts, etc.,
 - ii. As well as structured, planned, organized prayer.
 - iii. This is part of the reason why we say we have a relationship with God. We can always talk with Him throughout our day.
- d. Jesus modeled this
 - i. He often pulled aside to pray, even early in the morning.
 - ii. But He would also pray spontaneously in the middle of circumstances
 - 1. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

3. In everything give **thanks** (5:18)

The previous two commands deal with one's time (always and continually) this one deals with his circumstances, although a similar passage in Ephesians shows we are to have an attitude of perpetual gratitude.

Ephesians 5:20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

Notice this is more than an attitude though.

It's one thing to be grateful. It's another to give thanks. Gratitude is what you feel. Thanksgiving is what you do. Tim Keller

Not just advice for better living (although it would improve life for most of us if we cultivate more gratitude, prayed more regularly, and looking for things to rejoice in). They are God's will.

We tend to think about God's will in terms of decision making. Which job is God's will for me to take? Is it God's will for me to marry this person? Is it God's will for me to be a missionary?

Yet, the Bible talks about God's will for us in terms of moral obedience and godly character, not individual decision making.

He does have a sovereign will that He is unfolding for all of history, including your life, and that won't be thwarted.

Isaiah 46:10 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';

Decision making and God's will

Consider whether it is permitted in His moral will (i.e. is it sin?)

Pray for wisdom.

James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

Obtain wise counsel.

Proverbs 20:18 Prepare plans by consultation, And make war by wise guidance

Prioritize according to kingdom values.

Matthew 6:33 "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Consider what makes sense to do.

Titus 2:6 Likewise urge the young men to be sensible;

Make a decision and trust God.

Proverbs 16:9 The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

Proverbs 20:24 Man's steps are *ordained* by the LORD, How then can man understand his way?

Not saying God isn't involved in our decision making or that He doesn't have a plan for us. My point is that the way many Christians go about seeking His will or plan is off and leads to unnecessary anxiety.

But whatever decision we make, and however it pans out, and however much we look back with regret, God's will for me now is to give thanks.

Why? And what if I don't feel very thankful?

- a. Give thanks for the way you see God at work in ***other people***.
 - i. **1 Thessalonians 1:2-3** We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; ³ constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father,
 - ii. **Romans 1:8** First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.
 - iii. If our eyes ever only look at ourselves, our world will grow progressively smaller and we will find little for which to give thanks. But if we look even outward at what God is doing in and through others, we'll find things to give thanks for.
 1. For the person who is showing a little more self-control over their words
 2. For the young mother that is learning about God's faithful love through the experience of loving a little one of her own.
 3. For the person who is stepping out and serving in a new way that feels uncomfortable for them.
 4. Rather than looking at others with jealousy or skepticism, give thanks for even the small steps of change you see.
- b. Give thanks that Jesus has conquered ***death*** for us.
 - i. **1 Corinthians 15:56-57** The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷ but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - ii. Our greatest enemy is conquered and need not be feared.
- c. Give thanks for simple things, like the ***meals*** He provides.
 - i. **Mark 8:6** And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the people.
 - ii. Acts 27:35 ³⁵ Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat.
 1. This was while he was in a storm on a boat about to be shipwrecked!
- d. Give thanks because it is fitting for God's ***people***.

- i. **Ephesians 5:3-4** But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; ⁴ and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.
- ii. Furthermore, being unthankful is a characteristic of those who are unregenerate
 - 1. **Romans 1:21** For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.
- iii. Makes sense why it is God's will for us *in Christ Jesus*.

4. Conclusion

- a. If we can do these three things, we're doing pretty well.
 - i. If we can rejoice, pray, and give thanks as continual life habits – that says a lot
 - ii. . . . about our view of God's control over life and His care for us personally
 - iii. . . . about our priorities and perspectives on life.
- b. If we can't rejoice, pray, or give thanks when a friend rejects us, our money runs short, or our health is bad – what does that say about our true values?



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