

*Thankfulness IS God's Will (1 Thess 5:18)*

Prepared and preached by Pastor Steve Rhodes, for and at Bethel Friends Church in Poland, OH on Sunday, November 20, 2022

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Finding God's Will

By Joni Eareckson Tada

*There's hardly a Christian who hasn't looked into the future and questioned, "What is God's will for my life?" Today's verse may be short and sweet, but it's all the answer you need. Be joyful. Pray continually. Give thanks. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

*"But you don't know my circumstances," I hear you saying. "How can I be thankful for pain and heartache?" God is not asking you to be thankful but to give thanks. There's a big difference between feeling thankful and giving thanks. One response involves emotions, the other, your will. Trusting God has absolutely nothing to do with trustful feelings.*

*Also, God's not asking you to give thanks for the tough times—only that you give thanks in them. Give thanks that he is sovereign... that he is in control... giving you grace and peace... and planning it all for your good and his glory.*

*Today's verse became my anchor when I was first paralyzed. I gritted my teeth, pushed aside feelings of despair, and willfully gave thanks for everything from the hospital breakfast of cold cornmeal mush to the grueling hours of daily physical therapy. Many months later a miracle occurred. I began to feel thankful. My brighter attitude enabled me to give thanks for greater things. Later on, another miracle happened: I was able to rejoice in suffering.*

*Finding God's specific will for my life was incidental. I happened upon it as I daily made 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 the anchor of my soul.*

*Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances and God will move heaven and earth to push you forward into his will. Whatever happens, whatever you decide, you will have every confidence that you are completely centered in his will for your life.<sup>1</sup>*

My theme today is:

We are to give thanks in all circumstances; thanksgiving, rejoicing, and praying are God's will for us.

1 Thess. 5:18

*...give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

- I. Let's put this passage in context.
  - a. In context these seem to be rapid fire exhortations as Paul closes the letter.
  - b. Paul begins closing the letter in verse 12 and goes through verse 21.
  - c. In verse 16 he says to always rejoice.
  - d. In verse 17 he says to constantly pray.
  - e. That brings us to verse 18.

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<sup>1</sup> Joni Eareckson Tada devotion on 08.11.2021

- f. Then, in verses 19-21 he says to:
  - g. *Do not quench the Spirit.*
  - h. *Do not despise prophecies, but test everything;*
  - i. *hold fast what is good.*
  - j. *Abstain from every form of evil.*
- II. Be thankful.
  - a. *...give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*
  - b. Notice it says “in” everything, not “for” everything. We give thanks “in” everything.” We give thanks not just in the stuff He gives us.
  - c. New American Commentary: *“Give thanks” translates the same verb (eucharisteō) Paul used when he told the Thessalonians that he thanked God for them and for their faith (1:2; 2:13).<sup>2</sup>*
  - d. *Public thanksgivings also serve as an example of gratitude toward others, which all Christians should follow, for ingratitude is characteristic of ungodliness (Rom 1:27).<sup>3</sup>*
  - e. *In addition, Paul’s public expressions of thanks showed his genuine appreciation for the churches and strengthened the bonds between them (Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 1:4; Phil 1:3; cf. Phlm 4–5).<sup>4</sup>*
  - f. *“In all circumstances” translates a phrase that could just as well mean “at all times.”<sup>134</sup> But the difference in meaning is not great, and Paul may have chosen an ambiguous phrase to cover both time and circumstance (cf. Eph 5:20, “give thanks always and for everything,” RSV).<sup>5</sup>*
  - g. *Paul never instructed the church to thank God for evil events **but to thank God that even in evil times and circumstances our hope remains, and God continues his work in our lives (Rom 8:28).**<sup>6</sup>*
  - h. Paul says “for” which is explanatory.
  - i. This is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
- III. It is the will of God.
  - a. It is God’s will for us to give thanks; however, the *this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you* is a wrap up of verses 16-18.
  - b. It is God’s will for us to rejoice always and pray constantly.

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<sup>2</sup> D. Michael Martin, [1, 2 Thessalonians](#), vol. 33, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 182.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Wanamaker argues that this “temporal understanding is to be slightly favored” (*1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 200).

<sup>5</sup> D. Michael Martin, [1, 2 Thessalonians](#), vol. 33, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 182.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

- c. **Somewhat surprisingly Paul almost never grounds either ethical or what we might call spiritual behavior in the will of God** (cf. 4:3, the only other instance). <sup>7</sup> That he does so here places a very strong warrant on the behavior commanded by him. This in turn indicates how much importance he places on it for his converts. For Paul praise, intercession, and thanksgiving were not optional for the Christian, but were required just as much as proper ethical conduct.<sup>8</sup>

#### IV. Applications

1. We must give thanks in good times and difficult times.
2. We must know that what man meant for evil God can use for good (Genesis 50:20).
3. We must know that God causes all things to work together for good for those who love God (Romans 8:28).
4. We must know that God is at work in us (Philippians 2:12-13).
5. We must know that difficult times build character, etc. Romans 5:3-5: *Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*
6. We must give thanks not for the bad circumstances, but in them.
7. We must be thankful knowing that God is in control. We must be thankful knowing that God has not left His throne.
8. We must be thankful for the valleys and the mountaintops. Without the valleys we cannot rejoice in the mountaintop experiences, the good times.
9. We must be thankful for the body of Christ (Hebrews 10:24-25).

*It was the coldest winter ever. Many animals died because of the cold.*

*The porcupines, realizing the situation, decided to group together to keep warm. This way they covered and protected themselves; but the quills of each one wounded their closest companions.*

*After awhile, they decided to distance themselves one from the other and they began to die, alone and frozen. So they had to make a choice: either accept the quills of their companions or disappear from the Earth. Wisely, they decided to go back to being together. They learned to live with the little wounds caused by the close relationship with their companions in order to receive the heat that came from the others. This way they were able to survive.*

*The best relationship is not the one that brings together perfect people, but when each individual learns to live with the imperfections of others and can admire the other person's good qualities.*

*The moral of the story is:*

*Just learn to live with the Pricks in your life!*

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<sup>7</sup> Charles A. Wanamaker, [\*The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text\*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 200–201.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

10. We must be thankful for God's love for us (John 3:16).
11. We must be thankful for prayer.
12. We must be thankful for food.
13. We must be thankful for clean water.
14. We must be thankful for running water, clean water, showers, baths, toilets, etc.
15. We must be thankful for our family, friends, etc.
16. We must be thankful for the sunshine.
17. We must be thankful for the rain drops.
18. We must be thankful for the sunrising and setting and pause to notice the beauty of each.
19. We must be thankful for the ability to read and write.
20. We must be thankful for all that we have in Christ. We are adopted into God's family (1 John 3:1). We are declared righteous, and so much more. We are given the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:30; John 14:18).
21. We must be thankful in all things.

**C.S. Lewis:** *"The Christian is not to ask whether this or that event happened because of a prayer. He is rather to believe that all events without exception are answers to prayer in the sense that whether they are grantings or refusals the prayers of all concerned and their needs have all been taken into account."*<sup>9</sup>

Prayer

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<sup>9</sup> (Jeeves Malcolm A. and Myers David G. *Psychology Through the Eyes of Faith*. 1987. Harper Publishing San Francisco. Christian College Coalition. Page 92. C.S. Lewis' book *Miracles* New York Macmillan, 1947 page 215.)