

Reasons for Thankfulness
1 Thessalonians 5:18
Dr. Steve Hereford, Pastor-Teacher
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INTRODUCTION

1. This week we will be celebrating Thanksgiving and in light of that I would like to talk about *Reasons for Thankfulness*.
2. To do that I would like to invite you to turn in your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5.
3. In our past studies of this passage we have noted 3 commands found in verses 16-18.
4. They are “rejoice” (v.16), “pray” (v.17), and “give thanks” (v.18).
5. Paul says in **verse 18**, “in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”
6. If there is ever a passage that would state the will of God for the child of God it's this one.
7. God desires His children to be thankful.
8. Coming from the apostle Paul to the Thessalonians is not a contradiction because Paul was a thankful man.
9. His life was consistent. Not only was he faithful and obedient but he was thankful in every circumstance.
10. In almost all of his epistles he begins with his thanks to God

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for his reader

- a) **Rom.1:8**
- b) **1 Cor.1:4**
- c) **2 Cor.1:11**
- d) **Eph.1:16**
- e) **Phil.1:3**
- f) **Col.1:3**
- g) **1 Thess.1:2**
- h) **2 Thess.1:3**
- i) **1 Tim.1:12**
- j) **2 Tim.1:3**
- k) **Phile.1:4**

11. When Paul therefore says to the Thessalonians to “give thanks,” “such a reminder...is characteristic of [his] practice and teaching” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, p.242).
12. Notice the adverbial phrase “in everything.”
13. “*In everything* (en panti) refers to all that occurs in life. No matter what struggles, trials, testings, or vicissitudes occur in the lives of Christians (with the obvious exception of personal sins” (John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* [Chicago: Moody Press, 2002]. 189).
14. This is emphatic and “lifts this admonition above the level of natural practice or possibility” (Hiebert).

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15. “It is a duty that is not dependent upon gratifying circumstances” (Hiebert).
16. They must practice thanksgiving “in every circumstance” (Montgomery).
17. “The preposition *in* (en) points to the circumstances of their thanksgiving. ‘In connection with everything,’ and *everything* makes the injunction all-inclusive” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Thessalonian Epistles*, p.242).
18. Paul wants his readers to meet unpleasant as well as pleasant circumstances with “a spirit of unflinching gratitude” (Hiebert).
19. Such an attitude is made possible only by the grace of God.
20. D. Edmond Hiebert says, “When we realize that God works all things out for good to those who love Him and are yielded to His will, thanksgiving under all circumstances becomes a glorious possibility” (*The Thessalonian Epistles*, p.242).
21. This morning I want to give you **3 reasons why believers give thanks**.
22. The first is because **they have a new heart**.

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I. Believers Give Thanks Because They Have a New Heart

- A. When God Regenerates a Person He Produces a New Heart that is Thankful

Even though he now has that kind of heart, he has to cultivate it in his life.

But...

1. This allows no excuse to be ungrateful

This is the reason for his instruction to the Thessalonians.

2. When Paul says “In everything” (en panti) he is referring to “all that occurs in life” (MacArthur)

“No matter what struggles, trials, testings, or vicissitudes occur in the lives of Christians (with the obvious exception of personal sins), they are to give thanks” (John MacArthur, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, p.189).

Helen Keller said, “I thank God for my handicaps; for, through them, I have found myself, my work, and my God.”

Someone said, “If men thanked God for good

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things, they wouldn't have time to complain about the bad."

3. Thankfulness should be part of the fabric of the regenerate life
 - a) **Phil.4:6** says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."
 - b) Eph.5:1-4 says, "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving" (NIV).
4. It is spiritually abnormal for Christians to be unthankful
 - a) Because Christians are not only called to be thankful, they are thankful

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- (1) **Col.3:15** says, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.”
 - (2) **Ps.118:21** says, “I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me, And You have become my salvation.”
- b) Unthankfulness disobeys the many Scripture texts that enjoin the believer to a life of gratitude

When the early church met, one of its main purposes was to give thanks to God

- (1) **Acts 2:42** says, “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”
- (2) **Acts 2:46-47** says, “Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were

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being saved.”

- (3) **Acts 5:41** says, “So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.”

B. Paul Identified Unbelievers as Ungrateful

1. This is what you were

Tit.3:3 says, “For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.”

2. Ungratefulness in many ways characterizes the human race

Romans 1:21 says, “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.”

II. Believers Give Thanks Because They Have a New Desire

A. Believers Desire to Obey God

1. When Paul gives the command to the

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Thessalonians to “give thanks,” that’s exactly what they did

2. It is reflected throughout both letters Paul wrote to them—they had a new desire because of their new heart
 - a) **1:6** says they “received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit.”
 - b) **2:13** says they “received the word of God” and “accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”
 - c) **3:6** says they were “longing to see us just as we also long to see you.”
 - d) **4:9** say they were loving “one another.”
 - e) **2 Thess.1:3** says their “faith” was “greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater.”
3. When Jesus talks about obedience He connects it to love
 - a) He says in **John 14:15**, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”

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- b) In **1 John 5:2-3** John connects both love and obedience and shows how they are inseparable to a regenerate heart

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.”

- B. Believers Are Consistently Thankful (When they are filled with the Spirit)

Erwin Lutzer says, “A Christian who walks by faith accepts all circumstances from God. He thanks God when everything goes good, when everything goes bad, and for the “blues” somewhere in-between. He thanks God whether he feels like it or not.”

If you struggle with what Lutzer just said, then consider these words from R.C.H. Lenski:

“If everything actually conspires to do us good, how can we do otherwise than always rejoice? What if we do not always at once see and feel the good, is there not joy in anticipating the sight?” (The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon [Columbus, O.: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937]. 358).

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Let's consider...

1. The example of Joseph - **Gen.50:15-21**

“When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!" 16 So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father charged before he died, saying, 17 "Thus you shall say to Joseph, "Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong." And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? 20 "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. 21 "So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.”

2. The example of Paul and Silas - **Acts 16:25**

“But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the

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prisoners were listening to them.”

3. The example of Jesus - **John 11:41**

“So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me.”

III. Believers Give Thanks Because This Reflects the Will of God

“For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

“What is? The three just mentioned and surely not only the last. God wants us to rejoice always, to pray ceaselessly, to give thanks in everything. If it is all his will, we certainly must not frustrate that will with our folly” (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* [Columbus, O.: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937]. 358).

And now he mentions “thanksgiving.”

William MacDonald says, “These three good habits have been called the standing orders of the church. They represent the will of God in Christ Jesus for us. The words in Christ Jesus remind us that He taught us these things during His earthly ministry and He was the living embodiment of what He taught. By teaching and example, He revealed to us God’s will

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concerning joy, prayer, and thanksgiving” (Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995]. 1 Th 5:18).

A. God’s Will is Our Thanksgiving

1. We are to walk in it

Col.2:6-7 says, “Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.”

2. We are to pray with it

a) **Dan.6:10** says, “Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously.”

b) **Phil.4:6** says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

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3. We are to sing from it
 - a) **Ps.30:4** says, “Sing praise to the Lord, you His godly ones, And give thanks to His holy name.”
 - b) **Ps.40:1-3** says, “I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me and heard my cry. 2 He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. 3 He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; Many will see and fear And will trust in the Lord.”
 - c) **Ps.100:1-5** says, “Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth. 2 Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before Him with joyful singing. 3 Know that the Lord Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. 4 Enter His gates with thanksgiving And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name. 5 For the Lord is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting And His faithfulness to all generations.”
 - d) **Ps.105:1-3** says, “Oh give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name; Make known His deeds

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among the peoples. 2 Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; Speak of all His wonders. 3 Glory in His holy name; Let the heart of those who seek the Lord be glad.”

B. God’s Word Reveals What We Are to Be Thankful For

1. Our weaknesses - **2 Cor.12:9**

“The weaker the human instrument, the more clearly God’s grace shines” (John MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible: 2 Cor.12:9).

“Paul took no pleasure in the pain itself, but rejoiced in the power of Christ that it revealed through him” (Ibid., MacArthur).

2. God’s grace - **2 Cor.12:9**

“The present tense of the verb translated ‘is sufficient’ reveals the constant availability of divine grace. God would not remove the thorn, as Paul had requested, but would continually supply him with grace to endure it” (John Jr MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible, electronic ed. [Nashville: Word Pub., 1997, c1997] 2 Co 12:9).

3. God’s goodness and lovingkindness - **Ps.106:1**

“Praise the Lord! Oh give thanks to the Lord, for

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He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting.”

4. Christ’s coming - **Rev.11:16-17**

“And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying, "We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign.”

5. The reception and application of God’s Word - **1 Thess.2:13**

“For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”

6. The deliverance from the power of indwelling sin - **Rom.7:23-25**

“But I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

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So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.”

7. Victory over death - **1 Cor.15:57**

“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

8. The salvation of souls - **Rom.6:17**

“But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed.”

9. The evangelism of the lost - **Rom.1:8**

“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.”

10. The love of the brethren - **2 Thess.1:3**

“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater.”

11. Zeal for Christ - **2 Cor.8:16**

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“But thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus.”

CONCLUSION

1. Believers give thanks because they have a new heart, and a new desire that reflects God’s will for thanksgiving.
2. Because of this we must cultivate a thankful heart

John MacArthur says, “Don’t complain when you are in bad circumstances; cultivate a thankful heart. If you are experiencing problems and grumbling all the time, it’s not because of your circumstances; it’s because of your inability to be thankful for the positive things God has brought in your life.”

3. You cultivate a thankful heart when you see that “all things work together for good” (Rom.8:28)

Romans 8:28 sets forth the overarching principle:

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

“God’s providence – His sovereign bending of all of life’s contingencies for believers’ ultimate blessing – causes them to be thankful for everything in life, knowing that it fits into His

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eternal purpose for them” (John MacArthur, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, p.189).

4. So this Thursday as you celebrate “Thanksgiving Day,” remember that this day is not the only day to “give thanks.” Everyday we are to be thankful because of the work of Christ in our life.

5. As we close this evening, I would like to read to you the Thanksgiving Proclamation on October 3, 1863 by President Abraham Lincoln:

The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God.

In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign States to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict; while that theatre has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union. Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the

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national defense, have not arrested the plough, the shuttle or the ship; the axe has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore.

Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battle-field; and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom. No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American People.

I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens.

And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His

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tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquillity and Union.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this Third day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the Unites States the Eighty-eighth.

By the President: Abraham Lincoln

William H. Seward,
Secretary of State

6. Does the tone of that proclamation reflect the desire of your heart—to praise the provident hand of God for His blessings?
7. If you're here today having been forgiven of all your sin through the death of Christ then you can truly offer to God a thankful heart for what He has done on your behalf.
8. But if you have never repented from your sin and turned to

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Christ, then the only thing you may be able to thank Him for is the fact you're still living and that He hasn't taken your life in judgment *yet*.

9. There is a judgment coming and I urge you to repent before it comes.
10. When John the Baptist saw “many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ‘Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance’” (Mat.3:7-8).
11. I have warned you today of that coming wrath, I too urge you to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance.”
12. Let's pray.